

THE MUSEUM
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FAR EASTERN ANTIQUITIES
(Östasiatiska Museet)
STOCKHOLM



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天和地的和諧。

這起源於遠古的中國人對自然的和諧與秩序的信仰，帶有某種神密的意味，
卻道出了對天，地，自然的觀注—日月出升與隱沒，星宿的變遷，晝夜的循環 ...
這最單純與最聖潔的法則形成了完整與諧和的循環。

飄浮於夢中，抓住最原初與最抽象柔和的自然韻律，
讓精神在涵蓋了自然一切的無限空間中飄浮 ...

天和地之間 ...

The Harmony of Heaven and Earth.

This originates with the beliefs of the ancient Chinese people concerning the harmony and order of nature. It portends a certain mysterious meaning, yet conveys an awareness of Heaven, Earth, and Nature – the appearance and the vanishing of the sun and the moon, the movements of the stars, and the cycle of day and night ...

This most simple and purest principle formed a complete and harmonious cycle.

Floating in the dream, grasping the most original and most abstract, gentle and natural rhythm, letting the spirit drift in the boundless space which contains all of Nature ...

Between Heaven and Earth ...

Ning Binbin

Artists' statement, for the ink painting exhibit "Floating in the Dream"
at the MFEA, Stockholm, February 16 – April 1, 2002

Translated by the editors. Superimposed on painting by Ning Binbin.

Editor's Preface:

On the *Concept* of Correlative Cosmology

by

Martin Svensson Ekström

Like all concepts, “correlative cosmology” is conditioned by historical, ideological, psychological, and perhaps even biological realities. We are, however, surprisingly forgetful of this fact and—to take a conspicuous example—often speak of “Confucianism” as though it could be equated with a coherent, monolithic set of doctrines, or even with a phantasmatic kong-fu-zi-ism emerging from and united by the figure of Confucius. In a similar manner, and given its tremendous approval by sinology during the last century, we have almost been led to believe that to “correlative cosmology” there answers a specific Chinese concept. We have almost forgotten its origin as a concept encompassing, most notably, the early Chinese theories of stimulus-and-response (*ganying* 感應), correlative categories (*lei* 類), the five phases (*wu xing* 五行), and yin-and-yang 陰陽. We have almost forgotten its role as a convenient model for explaining and understanding certain aspects of early Chinese thought. But as Nietzsche and his followers in the 20th century have demonstrated, to present heterogeneous and contradictory thinking as solid truths, and to lull its user into cosy forgetfulness of its chaotic origin—this is indeed the seductive nature and function of the concept.

The observation that “correlative cosmology” (like “Confucianism” and not least the very concept of “China”)¹ is ultimately a Western construction bringing together many different strands of thought from the Chinese tradition, leads to two sets of questions. First, when and under what historical and ideological circumstances did the original ideas appear, and how were they interconnected? Second, why did they come together as one concept in the Western mind: what fantasies did it satisfy, what ideological (political, academic) *problématiques* did it solve?

¹ For a survey of the early history of the concept *zhongguo* 中國 (the Middle States, “China”), see Luo Zhitian 羅志田, “Xian Qin di wufuzhi yu gudai di tianxia-zhongguoguan 先秦的五服制與古代的天下觀,” *Xue ren* 學人, vol. 10 (Oct. 1996): 367–400. On related matters, see Allen Chun, “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity,” *boundary 2* 23.2 (1996): 111–138; Magnus Fiskesjö, “On the ‘Raw’ and the ‘Cooked’ Barbarians of Imperial China,” *Inner Asia* 1.2 (1999): 139–68; Wang Ming-ke, *Hua-Xia bianyuan: Lishi jiyi yu zuqun rentong* 華夏邊遠: 歷史與族群認同 [The frontiers of Hua-Xia: Historical memory and ethnic identity] (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 1997).

"Things of the same correlative category [*lei* 類] naturally attract one another; things of the same *qi*-ether 氣 naturally come together; tones that are similar answer [*ying* 應] each other," says *Mr. Lü's Annals* (*Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋) from around 239 BCE.² The idea that all worldly phenomena spontaneously exert influence on each other and so organize themselves according to inherent correlative categories was soon developed into a discourse in which the human body, the bureaucratic system of the Han state, and the constellations were related in identical terms.³ Thus, the body's "circulation tracts" were described as "offices [*guan* 官] "in the central bureaucracy of the body,"⁴ and the constellations bore the name of imperial offices, as in the aptly named "Book on Celestial Offices" 天官書 in the *Shiji* 史記 (late second century BCE). Moreover, already the *Lüshi chunqiu* had argued that Heaven (or "nature" *tian* 天) would spontaneously send down omens when a great Emperor or King was about to make his appearance, and urged man to act in harmony with heaven.⁵ To achieve this end, the *Annals* detailed what colour clothes to wear, what rituals to perform, what to eat etc. during the different months of the year.⁶

This insight prompts two comments. First, in spite of the fuzziness of the Western concept of correlative cosmology, speculations about intricate connections between governmental institutions and human and heavenly bodies were indeed an important part of the political, medical, and astronomical discourses from the late third century BCE. Second, these correlations were not simply nominal or, differently put, metaphorical in their application of a name drawn from one cognitive domain to another. On the contrary: by naming a star or a part of the human body after a government office, the cosmologist intended not only to indicate the importance (or "rank") of the star or body part in question through abstract analogies with the rank and file of the terrestrial bureaucratic system. His goal was also (and, according to some scholars, primarily) to draw attention to the system of correlations itself which preceded and shaped language rather than the other way around. As we shall see below, there was a tension between the linguistic and cultural act of name-giving, and the natural order that existed *toujours déjà* and which these names were supposed to represent, and this tension reappears in various forms in modern sinology.

It is not my task here to examine how the discourses on cosmological correlations originated and gained acceptance.⁷ Instead, and as a link to the ensuing introduc-

² *Lüshi chunqiu*, ed. Chen Qiyu 陳奇猷 (Taipei: Huazheng, 1988), 678 ("Ying tong 應同" chapter).

³ See Nathan Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.1 (June 1995): 5–37, and John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), chapter one.

⁴ Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body," 12, defines the so-called circulation tracts as "ensembles of functions." For a recent discussion of the construction of the Chinese sky in Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky during the Han: Constellating Stars and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 23. The Chinese sky did not only contain high offices, but also (in Sun's and Kistemaker's delicate phrase, 1) "the Celestial Toilet and the Pit of Manure."

⁵ *Lüshi chunqiu*, *ibid.*

⁶ *Lüshi chunqiu*, *ibid.*

⁷ Cf. Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), chapter four and *passim*; Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body," 11; Li Ling 李零 *Zhongguo fangshu kao* 中國方術考 (Peking: Renmin zhongguo chubanshe, 1993), second chapter and *passim*; Henderson, *Development and Decline*, chapter one; and Aihe Wang's article below.



tion of the articles in this issue, I will briefly consider two important sinological works which ascribe to correlative cosmology a fundamental influence on Chinese language and literature, namely William Boltz's *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* and Pauline Yu's *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition*.⁸

Unlike Egyptian, in which the once pictographic characters with time became "mere" symbols for sounds, the Chinese writing system never evolved into an alphabet, although such tendencies are visible in the Mawangdui 馬王堆 manuscripts, unearthed from a grave sealed in 168 BCE. In these manuscripts, Boltz exemplifies, the character 句, which usually means "hook" in pre-Han texts, represents several words which were similarly pronounced but semantically completely different, such as "after/behind" (usually written 後), "queen" (usually 后), and "if only" (usually 苟).⁹ Why was this trend toward phoneticization of the Chinese script never completed but, instead, halted and reversed? Boltz hypothesizes that the polysemy exemplified above was fundamentally at odds with the "Chinese world-view" which expected a "natural order" to obtain "between words and characters."¹⁰ A written character, in this view, should carry no more than one, well-defined meaning. In support of his thesis, Boltz quotes Roy Andrew Miller's bold description of this specifically Chinese thought pattern, according to which

No name of anything, no word in the Chinese language, was thought to be of and in itself arbitrary, or in anyway the result of an arbitrary agreement on the part of the society employing it. Everything in the cosmos and on earth was the way it was, and every word, or name, was the word or name it was, for a reason: and that reason was a *reflection of cosmic order. Behind each item of language there lurked some element of the ethical order of the cosmos. . . .*¹¹

What should interest us here is not the customary description of a scrupulous and static cosmic order, but rather the notion that orthodox (written) language reflected and implemented such an order by reversing the movement of phoneticization—a process of abstraction which otherwise would have resulted in a Chinese alphabet (truly a phantasm!), and would have renounced the "physical and tangible" traditional writing system.¹² Moreover, what the language of correlative cosmology (although that term is not used by Boltz) meticulously emulates is a world always already ordered into correlative categories, and it does so by "systematically using semantic classifiers [i.e. radicals]."¹³

It is hardly a coincident that claims of a typically Chinese fondness for concreteness (for the "physical and tangible"), and descriptions of Chinese linguistic acts as

⁸ William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven: Americal Oriental Society, 1994); Pauline Yu, "Metaphors and Chinese Poetry," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 3.2 (1981): 204–24; *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁹ Boltz, *Origin*, 168.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 174, italics added.

¹² *Ibid.*, 176.

¹³ Boltz, *Origin*, 170, notices that, during a period of "semantic instability," the character 冬 represented both the word "winter" (conventionally written 冬) and "to end" (conventionally written with the "silk" 糸 radical/classifier as 終).

little more than passive reflections of a world already neatly ordered into categories, had also been made in Pauline Yu's otherwise very different works on Chinese poetics. In what has become a classic sinologic gesture, Yu deftly renounced the idea that Chinese poetry and poetics could have accommodated any equivalents of the Western concepts of allegory and metaphor, for to the Chinese mind "analogies already exist[ed], to be *discovered* by the poet, not manufactured."¹⁴ In other words, Chinese poetry, and language in general, could not have been allegorical or metaphorical since the world it reflected was itself allegorical and metaphorical (another phantastic concept), its stuff thoroughly categorized and correlated long before the Chinese poet appeared. The other eminently sinological gesture visible in this short quotation is the claim that Chinese poetry, or at least its so-called analogies, was not "manufactured." This claim is part and parcel of what Yu names the typically "Asian" "affective-expressive conception of poetry," and which itself can be traced to the classical concept of "stimulus-and-response" (*ganying*). The theory of an "affective-expressive" poetics derives ultimately from Yu's interpretation of the opening paragraphs of the "Great Preface to the Book of Poetry" 毛詩大序 and involves several claims about the nature of Chinese poetry and poetics.¹⁵ First, Chinese poetry (or should we say "lyric"?) polarizes with Western poetry which, as the word's etymology (*poiein*, "to make") reminds us, is consciously crafted, in analogy with the divine Creation from which the Westerner believes stems his cosmos.¹⁶ Second, just as the Chinese universe is "self-generating," rather than the result of divine creation, so the Chinese bard is devoid of the "individuality" and "creative ingenuity" which allegedly characterize the Occidental poet.¹⁷ His lyrics are therefore spontaneously provoked—and thus not created—"by contact and interaction" with the world, between which and himself there is a "seamless connection."¹⁸

Pauline Yu has in an exceptional manner taken the tendencies inherent in twentieth century Sinology to their logical extreme, and presented Chinese cosmology, poetry, and poetics as radical alternatives to their Western counterparts. While Western philosophy relies on a metaphysical notion of a transcendent Creator, the Chinese correlative cosmos is a "self-generating organism"; while Western poetry abounds with the man-made tropes called metaphors which describe one thing in terms of another, Chinese lyric provides a literal representation of a wondrous meta-

¹⁴ Yu, "Metaphors," 224. Cf. also *Reading of Imagery*, 33: "the connections between subject and object or among objects, which the West has by and large credited to the creative ingenuity of the poet, are viewed in the Chinese tradition as already pre-established...." See also Yu's classic definition of correlative cosmology in *ibid.*, 32, n. 95: "Chinese thought conceives of the universe as a spontaneous self-generating organism in which all phenomena exist in orderly, mutually implicating, correlative harmonies...."

¹⁵ The "Great Preface" is an early Han text on the origin and function of poetry, appended to the Mao edition of the *Shi* 詩. Chapter four of Steven Van Zoeren's *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) gives a fairly unbiased overview of the "Great Preface" which acknowledges the aporetic nature of this complex text. See also the insightful discussion in Hermann-Josef Röllicke, *Die Fährte des Herzens: Die Lehre vom Herzensbestreben (zhi 志) im Grossen Vorwort zum Shijing 詩經* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1992), 128–38 and *passim*. Alternative interpretations are suggested by the present author in "A Second Look at the Great Preface on the Way to a New Understanding of Han Dynasty Poetics," *Chinese Literature, Essays, Articles, Reviews* 21 (1999): 95–128.

¹⁶ See Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 27. In this context, see also Plato's dialogue *The Sophist* 219b, where *poiein* is indeed defined as the "leading into being" (*eis ousian agē*) of that which previously "did not exist" (*mē... on*).

¹⁷ Yu, *Reading of Imagery*, 32–33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

phorical universe; and while the Western poet is a clever maker of artful metaphors, the Chinese bard is a passive medium for cosmological forces. And so on.

It has been my intention, not to criticize two important sinological works, but to draw attention to how the concept of correlative cosmology is used therein to structure their arguments and provide explanations at critical junctures, and how two quite different scholarly projects thus have come to make very similar claims about Chinese language and literature. It is symptomatic that neither of the two authors has an interest in discussing directly and in detail correlative cosmology, its complex history and development, but rely instead on received ideas from other sinological works. It is also symptomatic that both scholars use correlative cosmology to expound their phantasmatic preoccupations (Boltz's Chinese alphabet and the "physical and tangible" Chinese script; Yu's metaphorical world as mirrored in the spontaneous lyrics of a depersonalized bard). It is evidence of their greatness that they accomplish to engage also the reader's imagination.

II.

The six articles in this special issue of the *BMFEA* approach the phenomenon of correlative cosmology from widely different angles. Haun Saussy describes how one version of correlative cosmology appeared in missionary writings in the late nineteenth century and was taken over by the Chinese intelligentsia, and how other forms of the discourse on categories were later developed by Durkheim and Mauss, Marcel Granet, and recently in the works of Léon Vandermeersch and François Julien. Ironically, Saussy sees in the latter works a return of the missionary claim that correlative thinking is a specifically Chinese "problem," unlike Granet who, for all his idiosyncrasies, did "not take for granted the category of 'category'."

Michael Puett argues that many early proponents of correlative cosmology were well aware that they were advocating a radically new philosophy. The "Chuzhen" 俶真 chapter the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, Puett demonstrates, was partially written as a critical commentary to a passage in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 but did not uncritically force the doctrine of correlative cosmology on to the earlier text. Realizing the gulf between Master Zhuang's critique of cosmogony and their own vision of a correlated cosmos, the authors of "Chuzhen" showed how Zhuangzi's insights could be turned against himself in favour of a correlative cosmology.

The article jointly written by Steve Farmer, John Henderson, and Michael Witzel reiterate several tenets presented in Henderson's celebrated 1984 study on Chinese cosmology, but re-inscribe them in a wholly new context. With reference to neurological analyses of the brain the authors argue that correlation and categorizing are activities conditioned by the structure of the human brain, thus occurring in all cultures. When early speculations on a correlated cosmos passed from an oral culture into a literate one, they became increasingly systematized and resulted in the correlative schemes found in Chinese philosophical works from the late third century BCE and elsewhere.

Hans-Georg Moeller argues that early Chinese language philosophy made a sharp distinction between the realm of “the languageable” and that of “the (radically) non-languaged,” in contrast to the typically Western division of signifier and signified. In a particularly interesting and provocative passage, Moeller denounces the conventional interpretation of Xunzi’s 荀子 words about the “agreement” (*yue* 約) between word and thing. This, Moeller holds, is fundamentally different from Occidental theories of the arbitrariness of the sign. Moeller concludes, however, that “the [Occidental] interest in the theory of language...are of as little assistance in understanding the *Zhuangzi* as they are in understanding the *Xunzi*.”

Aihe Wang’s article provides an insightful historical analysis of correlative cosmology and its development in sinology and the social sciences during the last century. While Wang laments the decrease in theoretical awareness in contemporary sinology, she welcomes the emergence of new discourses, such as Li Ling’s 李零 discussion of material cultures, which challenges and supplants conventional “intellectual history.”

Informed by recent scholarship, Jessica Rawson demonstrates how different conceptions of correlative cosmology bodied forth in funeral art from the Han Dynasty onward. Through comparisons with Western philosophy and its expression in the Mediterranean countries, Rawson argues that “the very special features of the Chinese view of the cosmos” determined and organized the ornamentation and structure of Chinese tombs.

These six articles have been selected under the motto of *Dialogue, not Diatribe*. It is my honour and pleasure on behalf of the *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* to thank the authors—as well as the referees—for their fine contributions, and to invite the readers to continue the discussion.

Correlative Cosmology and its Histories

by
Haun Saussy

*Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! sans ces étoiles
Dont la lumière parle un langage connu!*

Baudelaire, "Obsession"

"The Chinese have always been inclined to view the world in terms of categories," says the author of a recent outline of Chinese civilization, and on the same page repeats that "Since ancient times, the Chinese have organized the world into various categories."¹ These are the sort of sentences one reads twice, then three times, wondering if one has missed something. It is hard to see how the Chinese or any other people could have "viewed" or "organized" the world, spoken about it, or perhaps even lived in it, without categories, thinks the reader. Doesn't "category" mean "predication," "way of stating," and in the usage customary since Aristotle also refer to "one of a set of possible ways of saying something [*katagoreuein*] about a subject"?² Moreover, categories may be subconscious, culturally enforced, buried in the mechanics of language or otherwise unavailable to direct inspection, save when an anthropologist notes the predilection of a society to group together items in this or that way; it's not as if categorizing is something one simply does or does not do.³ Systems of categories are apt to appear wholly natural only to insiders, thus categories go hand in hand with the idea of cultural distinctiveness; but a people without categories is imaginable only at the edges of a Borges fable. Perhaps then

¹ Edward L. Shaughnessy, "The Harmony of Heaven and Earth," in Shaughnessy, ed., *China: Empire and Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 120.

² See Aristotle, *Categories* and *Metaphysics*. "Category" derives from the Greek verb *katagoreuô*, "to announce," "to accuse," "to predicate [something of something]." Aristotle is shrewder than many of his interpreters in maintaining the investigation of the categories of being as simultaneously a study of what is and of what can be said about what is (*Metaphysics* 1003a 33: "Being is spoken of in various ways").

³ On "cognitive mapping" and its extension through metaphor, see George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). And for a correction of some notions implied by a "map"-like account of meaning, see Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 183–98.

the author's statements about categories, rather than applying categorically to "the Chinese," should be corrected: "Human beings have always (and necessarily?) been inclined to perceive and express the world through meaningfully related groups of terms"; "Since the beginnings of an identifiable human history, our species has invented ways of subdividing and classifying its perceived and spoken environment, and the Chinese are no exception."

The above *faux-naïf* reading of a pair of sentences from Edward Shaughnessy's popular illustrated survey of Chinese culture is not meant to tease Shaughnessy (or deride the genre of popularizations), but to call attention to the specific trade jargon involved in the sinological discussion of "categories." Of course all people categorize; but we who study China (whether from "inside" or "outside" it) are apt to think that traditional Chinese categorized in a particularly insistent and conspicuous way. The Five Black Categories of class enemy in Maoist China; the medical correspondences linking points on the inner ear and the sole of the foot with certain inner organs, items of diet and times of the days and month; the tables of equivalents that help one to step from an arrangement of solid and broken lines to an oracular text and thence to the text's elucidations and finally to some relation to the questioner's lived experience—these are but a few familiar indices of the common, admitted, obligatory language of category in China. It seems that while every people speaks and thinks in categories, the Chinese way of doing so is unusual in moving the classifications themselves from the domain of tacit assumptions to that of public assertion and qualification. Neither felt only in obscure, rarely articulated social pressures nor restricted to the technical vocabulary of a specialist clan, the numbered set and the cross-linked database are well within the daily conversation of any Chinese-speaker one might encounter in daily life. It is that availability of the categorizing faculty that causes specialists to narrow the meaning of "category" so that it becomes a mark of Chinese culture, rather than a universal human endowment.

So much for casual observation and generalization. But sinology should not rest content with systematizing bits of gossip. Commonplaces express themselves well enough: there are lilies that do not need to be gilded. Yes, of course Chinese texts and speakers of Chinese have long relished the "list with commentary" as a means of recording knowledge, and the rhetorical force of such catalogues should not be overlooked even if, in the rhetoric of Europe since the waning of scholasticism, lists are a comparatively weak stylistic gesture. And yes, the particular accounts of the world to which a categorical presentation refers have deep bases in traditional Chinese thinking. But the point of talking about Chinese uses of "categories" is not usually just to state the obvious; analyses, hypotheses and explanatory models always lurk behind descriptions, however simple. The sinological concept of "category" ("categorical correspondence," "cosmological correspondences," and the whole family of such terms) grows from a somewhat more ambitious project. In its development as a branch of social reflection, the study of China has long attributed a special prominence to the category of category, seeking both to explain its functions and origins within Chinese culture and to locate it within the perspective of generally human sciences (sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics and so forth). Theoretical interest in Chinese categories peaks early in the twentieth century with the articulation of a certain

set of hypotheses about the relation of intellectual forms to social factors. Although the particular hypotheses made have, naturally, been subject to the erosion of time, their comparative mode of investigation has much to recommend it. Combining methods and approaches was a purpose deeply inscribed in the study of Chinese categories. Merely saying that categorical thinking is “Chinese” or a distinguishing feature of “Chineseness” seems to involve a forgetting of these purposes. And so I think it may be useful to revisit them.

The question to ask about “categories” is therefore: what are the conditions of the emergence of the question as a question, and what are the exact links between its life as a question about China and as a question about human faculties generally? If my framing of this question assumes a European context for the investigation, one must look for the parallel and intertwining threads of discussion within China, too, for it is hardly a foregone conclusion that the problem will present itself in quite the same way, or follow the same paths of enquiry, for researchers starting from within the Chinese culture-world.⁴ The present essay cannot hope to give a comprehensive view of the question; at most it can only suggest that the question merits historiographical investigation on many different fronts, and propose readings of a few formative moments in the development of a discourse about Chinese “categorical correspondence.”

2.

The play of “categories” and “categorical correspondences” first comes to international prominence as a feature of the Chinese mind through missionary writings of the late nineteenth century. The reason for describing the Chinese proclivity to categorization is to account for the resistance to the teaching of foreign science and technology among many literate and influential people in traditionalist milieus of the late Qing. The American missionary and interpreter of China S. Wells Williams, explaining for an English-speaking audience the traditional Five Elements 五行 theory of cyclical phases in nature, calls it

a satisfactory explanation to Chinese philosophers of the changes going on in the visible universe, for no possible contingency can arise which they are not prepared to solve by their analysis of the evolution of its powers. Through their speculations by this curious system they have been led away from carefully recording facts and processes, and have gone on, like a squirrel in a cage, making no progress toward the real knowledge of the elements they treat of.⁵

⁴ The topic of categorization thus falls under the heading of intercultural interpretation—the understanding of “insiders” (and perhaps their understanding of or differences with other “insiders”) by “outsiders,” the further understanding of that understanding by other “insiders” and “outsiders,” in a long series of reverberating relationships. For studies of moments and topics in sinology as intercultural contacts of this kind, see Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (Harvard East Asian Monographs, 212; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵ S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom* (2nd ed.; New York: Scribners, 1895), 2: 74. A scurrilous and hugely popular missionary diatribe on Chinese folkways that shares many themes with Williams is Arthur Henderson Smith, *Chinese Characteristics* (10th ed.; New York: Revell, 1894).

Thus the Chinese unwillingness to accept experimental science and modern medicine circa 1880, for example, replays the clash between textual-minded clerics and experimentally-minded scientists in Renaissance Europe as vehicled by nineteenth-century historiography. The modern Europeans have discovered progress and observation, while the medievals and the Chinese cling to a familiar and tidy world-picture drawn from authoritative texts. The Chinese case is if anything even worse than the European, for “no possible contingency”—such as an unexplained epicycle—“can arise” which might raise questions about the viability of their “system.” “No contingency,” Williams suggests, means “no progress.” Lu Xun, who read and—to the embarrassment of some modern critics of a post-colonial bent—took to heart many of the missionary accusations about “Chinese characteristics,” returns again and again in his writings to the topic of Chinese medicine, which serves as the vehicle for a broader critique of Chinese civilization. For Lu Xun, a medical tradition that produced beautiful theoretical constructions but was unable to cure patients, and moreover fleeced them by prescribing expensive and futile treatments, was indicative of a culture that had lost touch with the goal of serving human ends.⁶ In this view, if Chinese tradition is strong in categories, so much the worse for Chinese tradition.

Categorical cosmology emerges, then, as a culturally specific “characteristic” in the writings of a group of people frustrated by the traditional environment and desirous of change (seeking the replacement of an old framework of knowledge by another thought to be more valuable or more conducive to producing useful devices). The “Chinese inclination towards categories” is put by them at the antipodes of human needs and made a symptom of a stratified society in which those who do the thinking need neither to represent reality nor to take thought for their less fortunate fellow men.

3.

At more or less the same time as reformers (many of them missionaries or charitable workers from abroad) described the system of Chinese cosmological categories as a brake on practical solutions to China’s greater needs in education, medicine, science, technology, and industry—a *specifically Chinese* problem and a problem in relation to *modernity*—the builders of the discipline of sociology were writing the same system into the general history of human thought as a particularly instructive example, a case that would exhibit most clearly what was true of *all* peoples in *all* ages.

Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss’s “On Some Primitive Forms of Classification: A Contribution to the Study of Collective Representations” (1902) advances the claim, familiar from Durkheim’s 1912 classic work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, that the root vocabulary of speculative thought is a projection of social organization; that sociology, by appealing to its specific areas of competence (collective behavior, the structure of social action, the attribution of value), can clarify

⁶ See e.g. Lu Xun 鲁迅, “Zi xu 自序” (Author’s preface) to *Na han* 呐喊 (1922; rpt., Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1973), 1–6.

issues that frustrate philosophers and psychologists.⁷ Illusions particular to the professions of metaphysician or psychologist, or to the epistemological stances of positivism or individualism, lead us to think (as did Sir James George Frazer, for example) that we discover order in the world and then apply it to our own lives, but Durkheim and Mauss have it very much at heart to persuade us that the storyline runs the other way.⁸ Organization is an activity, not an attribute. The world does not present itself to us with lines of classification already drawn upon it; rather, it is a heterogeneous flow of representations and impressions that awaits our activity to stabilize and determine it. Human societies, while needing to organize behavior and communication, also have the resources (through child-rearing, language, tradition, spectacle, religion, law) to impose a version of the ways things are. Thus what is actually primary in the encounter of categorical thinking and the world is neither the world nor the categories, but the social framework that makes it possible (and, what is more, necessary) for people to organize the world into categories.

Durkheim and Mauss are thus engaged in constructing a model history for classification in general, and in confirming it by working backwards through the classification-systems of particular groups toward a recovery of the likely phases of the development of each system. We can observe that this model history works inversely to most classification systems, since these latter are more concerned with reducing historical events (seasons, items of diet, presages, stages of life) to repeatable identities within a stable vocabulary than with discovering that their vocabularies arose from a background of change; and also because some category-systems (such as religious mappings of the world) stand to lose from their redescription as ghostly forms of the social.⁹ Both these forms of counter-intuitive reasoning relate to the ultimate project of sociology as Durkheim and Mauss conceived it, that is, to making a just assessment of collective "forces" with the aim of stripping them of their mythic authority, bringing them down to the human scale.

The essay on classification begins with an examination of certain Australian tribes which subdivide their population into the two moieties of Yungaroo and Wutaroo. Correlatively, for them, the sun is Yungaroo and the moon Wutaroo, alligators are Yungaroo, kangaroos Wutaroo, and so forth: every new piece of information encountered must be categorized under one or the other heading. Here, incontestably, "les idées sont organisées sur un modèle qui est fourni par la société."¹⁰ Then societies with progressively more complex forms of organization are discussed, with their corresponding forms of scientific classification. The Zuñi ordering of objects, seasons, activities, and omens is double: things to be categorized are attached to a roster of clan identities and also aligned with one or another of the directions of a compass rose. The two sub-systems (clans and directions) exhibit some degree of

⁷ Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, "De quelques formes primitives de classification: contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives," *L'Année sociologique* 6 (1901–1902): 1–72 (hereafter abbreviated as "Classification"); Emile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912; rpt., Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994).

⁸ Frazer is Durkheim's antagonist in both the *Elementary Forms* and "Classification."

⁹ For an example from another culture of the deliberate transformation of history into a recurring pattern of meaningful type-events, see Jacob Neusner, *The Presence of the Past, the Pastness of the Present: History, Time and Paradigm in Rabbinic Judaism* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Durkheim and Mauss, "Classification," 25.

mutual correlation, some conflict and some redundancy. For the Zuñi cosmology, Durkheim and Mauss suppose a hybrid origin, relating to some transformation of the social fabric in the past whereby two different forms of clan organization were combined without discarding one or the other. "Ainsi, les deux types de classification que nous venons d'étudier ne font qu'exprimer, sous des aspects différents, les sociétés mêmes au sein desquelles elles se sont élaborées; la première était modelée sur l'organisation juridique et religieuse de la tribu, la seconde sur son organisation morphologique.... Mais l'un et l'autre cadre sont d'origine sociale."¹¹

It would be an inaccurate simplification to attribute to Durkheim and Mauss a mirror-theory of linguistic classifications (according to which vocabulary and implicit mental structure would be determined by, and reproduce, the organization of society): they acknowledge historical memory, pointing out that "Une fois que cette organisation de la mentalité collective existe, elle est susceptible de réagir sur sa cause et de contribuer à la modifier."¹² That is, the action of classifying leaves material traces which become part of a society's memory and way of life. It has a weight of its own; it is not merely a shadow of the present state of affairs, as some crudely deterministic adaptations of Marxian social analysis might suggest.

Durkheim and Mauss then move on to discuss

un dernier type de classification qui présente tous les caractères essentiels de ceux qui précèdent sauf qu'il est, depuis qu'il est connu, indépendant de toute organisation sociale. Le meilleur cas du genre, le plus remarquable et le plus instructif, nous est offert par le système astronomique, astrologique, géomantique et horoscopique des Chinois....

Cette classification des espaces, des temps, des choses, des espèces animales domine toute la vie chinoise.¹³

The Chinese system, as Durkheim and Mauss elicit it from ethnographic studies like J. J. M. de Groot's,¹⁴ arranges phenomena around the eight reference-points constituted by the Eight Directions or the Eight Trigrams, in combination with the Five Elements (or phases of matter as we would say today). A phenomenon is to be categorized in relation to other like phenomena which are also distributed among the same set of headings, and further specified under additional calendrical or circumstantial headings; an item is to be seen as participating in multiple series at once, whether as type or as event. Thus the color red occupies, among colors, the same place that the lungs occupy among viscera, that Shen Nong occupies among sovereigns and that fire occupies among elements.¹⁵ It is not simply that red, lungs, Shen Nong and fire are "alike"—though a likeness may always be discovered—but that each of these is similarly related to the other items in its own set, and all thus are counterparts of one another. As Durkheim and Mauss describe this system, the autonomy it accords to speculative thought as regards social structure is obvious, since no one claims there to have existed in the recorded history of China obliga-

¹¹ Ibid., 55.

¹² Ibid., 25.

¹³ Ibid., 55, 60.

¹⁴ Jan Jakob Maria de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (6 vols., 1892–1912; rpt., Taipei: Chengwen, 1967).

¹⁵ Examples taken from Marcel Granet, *La Pensée chinoise* (1934; reprinted, Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), 309.

tory affiliations to two clans of Yin and Yang or an eight-level caste system. Another result of the autonomy of Chinese categorical thinking is its immense combinatorial elaboration:

A chacun [de ces catégories], tout un ensemble de choses est rapporté... La liste des espèces d'êtres, d'événements, d'attributs, de substances, d'accidents ainsi classés sous la rubrique des huit pouvoirs est vraiment infinie.... La pensée collective a travaillé, d'une façon réfléchie et savante, sur des thèmes évidemment primitifs. ...

La pensée chinoise... a multiplié, compliqué, sans se lasser, les divisions et subdivisions des espaces et des choses. Elle n'a pas même craint les contradictions les plus expresses... C'est qu'en effet, cette classification avait surtout pour objet de régler la conduite des hommes; or elle arrivait à cette fin, tout en évitant les démentis de l'expérience, grâce à cette complexité même.¹⁶

With the last sentence, one returns to a tone close to that of Williams and his squirrel-cage. The very properties that guarantee the social potency of category-language put it beyond the slings and arrows of a mere contradiction by experience. And thereby, once more, the primacy of the social over the scientific is restated—to the point that in course of the sentence that transmits this restatement (“C’est qu’en effet...”) a subtle shift of narrative responsibility occurs, and a paragraph that has been chiefly devoted to recounting the ethnographic material gathered by others swerves into the generalizing, conclusive voice of the sociologists themselves. The Australian and Zuñi conceptual systems “expressed” their respective societies (55); the Chinese system (after undergoing a “réfléchie et savante” reelaboration) now seems mainly to express its own potentialities and to shape society. But this does not disconfirm the larger hypothesis about the social origins of natural philosophy. The lack of a documented historical stage in early China at which thought and society would be reflections of one another only announces the need to imagine one. One must suppose that Chinese categorical thought originated to satisfy the needs of a long-forgotten social past, and one can still observe that past acting, through the rites, to organize social activity, for example in the choice of times and places for ceremonies, burials, and other significant public events.

The interest of Chinese categories for the discussion of the social origin of cognitive structures is that although we are forced to work in ignorance of their historical emergence, and though we must admit the complexity and sophistication of the intellectual devices employed, nonetheless they bear, in Durkheim and Mauss’s view, the marks of exactly the same sort of social reasoning as the more primitive examples adduced above. The meaningful contrasts to be drawn here are not between “categorical thinking” and some form of “purposive rationality” (as the missionary tracts and their many descendants in East-West studies would suggest), but rather between our assumption that some ways of understanding the world are rational, objective and based in the nature of things, and the message that all logic has a social history and no science is entirely drawn from observation of things as they are. If the Chinese, with all their sophistication, have so much in common with the aboriginal

¹⁶ Durkheim and Mauss, “Classification,” 57, 60, 58.

Australians, the Zuñis and the Sioux, then the Greeks and the nineteenth-century Europeans can hardly escape the same judgment. Sociology could hardly come to a different conclusion: after all, it is through sociology, according to Durkheim and Mauss, that philosophical reflection on philosophy can escape being trapped in a methodological circle. "Toutes ces questions, que métaphysiciens et psychologues agitent depuis si longtemps, seront enfin libérées des redites où elles s'attardent, du jour où elles seront posées en termes sociologiques."¹⁷ Just as Chinese scientific thought was to be liberated from the squirrel cage of its repetitions.

4.

For Durkheim and Mauss, then, the brute fact of Chinese categorical reasoning demands an explanation, and to give it an explanation means to give it a background in the social history of some particular time or times in China. As we have seen, for them the necessary history was unavailable, but it could be predicted by analogizing from other societies whose elaborate categorical systems "expressed," in one way or another, their structure. Underwriting the analogy was the supposition of common pressures and patterns among all societies.

Marcel Granet's exposition of Chinese concepts (given its most elaborate expression in his *La Pensée chinoise* of 1934) seeks to supply the missing history through analogy and textual clues. The Chinese, says Granet (initiating thereby a long series of differentialist epistemologies; Granet is one of those authors who are more often imitated than footnoted) do not conceive of Time and Space in the abstract, nor do they seek to isolate the transcendental character of time and space as pure forms of the understanding. Rather, Chinese thinking "prefers to see in Time a set of *eras*, of seasons or periods, and in Space a complex of *domains*, of climates or directions." A few examples suffice to show

qu'ayant à localiser dans le Temps et l'Espace, non pas des concepts définis et distincts, mais des emblèmes riches d'affinités, les Chinois n'avaient aucune disposition à concevoir, comme deux milieux indépendants et neutres, un Temps abstrait, un Espace abstrait. Pour abriter leurs jeux de symboles, ils avaient tout au contraire avantage à conserver aux représentations liées d'Espace et de Temps, avec un maximum d'attributs concrets, une solidarité favorable à l'interaction des emblèmes.¹⁸

The option taken, that of imagining Time and Space not as nearly contentless categories but as collections of "emblems," is that now

il est possible d'imposer au Temps comme à l'Espace tels ou tels caractères concrets.... Le Temps et l'Espace ne sont jamais conçus indépendamment des actions concrètes qu'ils exercent en tant que complexes d'emblèmes solidaires... [ils] sont toujours imaginés comme un ensemble de groupements, concrets et divers, de *sites* et d'*occasions*... Cette conception leur a fourni les cadres d'une sorte d'art total... Loin de leur

¹⁷ Ibid., 72.

¹⁸ Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, 78. For an earlier formulation of these questions, see Marcel Granet, "Quelques particularités de la langue et de la pensée chinoises," *Revue philosophique* 89–90 (1920): 98–128, 161–195.

paraître incohérents, les jeux de ces rubriques leur semblent commandés par un principe d'ordre: ce principe se confond avec le sentiment de l'efficacité du rythme.¹⁹

The Chinese intellectual style is thus (for Granet) messy and interactional, as distinct from a Cartesian, Lockean or "Western" effort to reduce ideas to their simple, "clear and distinct" components. To be sure, the purpose of this form of thought is quite different from Cartesian or Lockean reflection. It is rather

de classer, en vue de l'action et en raison de leurs efficacités particulières, les sites et les occasions.... L'objet de cet art, qui tient lieu de physique comme de morale, est d'aménager l'Univers en même temps que la Société. Les représentations collectives dont elles dérivent ne sont que la traduction des principes qui présidaient à la répartition des groupements humains: l'étude de ces représentations se confond avec une étude de morphologie sociale.²⁰

Thus Granet returns to the agenda of Durkheim and Mauss's "De quelques formes primitives de classification," but actually trumps their hypotheses. Where Durkheim and Mauss had adduced Chinese categories as the sort of intellectual construction that (to judge from Australian and Zuñi evidence) *must have* emerged (perhaps unconsciously) from a (now lost) social configuration, Granet will advocate the view that Chinese thinking about the universe always and from the beginning is designed to serve social ends. There is thus no uncovering to be performed by the sociologist, no critique of false objectivity, but at most a self-critique by any naive sinologist who might have started from the persuasion (shared by missionaries and reformers) that Chinese natural philosophy was an attempt to think about the natural world, only not a very good one. In a further reversal of missionary presuppositions, Granet sees Chinese categories as perfectly adapted to their task—however, that task is only accidentally that of a "natural science" and chiefly that of rallying social solidarity. It may seem condemned to spend eternity on the squirrel's wheel, running without getting anywhere; but for those who understand it, it is successful in mastering the indefiniteness of things and transforming them into a circle of effective representations, a master-symbol composed of symbols.

Time, for Granet's Chinese, is round, perpetuating the course of the seasons; space is square, each square of space oriented to the four directions and converging on that fifth direction that is its center. "Les techniques de la division et de l'aménagement de l'Espace... se rattachent apparemment aux pratiques du culte public. Les fidèles, en effet, se formaient en carré.... Ce carré sacré représente la totalité de l'Empire."²¹ The Empire being a descriptive and—in the times of its faltering—a normative concept, the square must be a kind of call to action. The perfect society is a square. Be therefore a square! Thus the square—especially but not only when it is formed of obedient vassals—is "related to a set of social rules." One of these is that the center is occupied by a Chief; another is that the four sides are non-equivalent: they are differentiated qualitatively and hierarchically. The heterogene-

¹⁹ Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, 79, 99 (Granet's italics).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 80 (Granet's italics).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

ity of the elements constituting the four sides also reflects back upon the center, making it the site of an encounter and an accommodation: the Chief is, in Granet's conceptual reconstruction, the only one who can adjust the divergent, possibly even warring faces of the Empire into a harmonious whole.

To this spatial logic (distance and direction marking the sides as different from but related to the center) now comes a compensatory unity from the side of Time. The elements of the Empire will pay regular courtesy visits to the Chief, but more or less frequently according to their importance: the more important nobles or factions will be "called upon to renew themselves most frequently at the source of all coexistence," that is, the Center. "La dignité des espaces résulte d'une sorte de création rythmée, l'aptitude à faire coexister qui sous-tend, pour ainsi dire, toute éten-due... C'est en classant et en répartissant à temps réglés les groupes qui composent la société humaine que le Chef parvient à instituer et à faire durer un certain ordre de l'Espace."²²

The term of *rhythm* has the strategic role of combining—as do the leading concepts of Granet's Chinese—the predicates of time and space. A rhythm is something particular that happens repeatedly within a certain context (within the hearing of an audience, for example). The organization of time proper to Chinese social life, according to Granet, is that of a "liturgical order," "the rhythmic framework of a liturgy" to be carried out again and again. A liturgy implies a center, "que détermine simultanément la proclamation d'un calendrier et l'inauguration d'une capitale fédérale." The Empire is a rhythm danced out from moment to moment. But here too the achieved state represented by the classical texts presupposes several stages of development. Granet reconstructs the beginnings of it all as an immemorial peasant experience of recurrent phases of weather and sociality.

There was, first, "une représentation de l'Univers et de la société simplement fondée sur les idées d'opposition et d'alternance." At this stage two sides—two moieties, as in Durkheim and Mauss's Australian examples—or else two Chiefs face off in a ritual combat for the possession of the world. In such a political order, society consists in the confrontation and repeated combat of two rival groups: time and space are possessed *either* by this group or by that one; the contest between the two is a moment of crisis punctuating periods of alternating dominance.

The dual organization of society recurs in the organization of Granet's imagined primitive calendar, where long seasons of inactivity or hard labor alternate with infrequent, specially charged moments at the change of seasons. At the turn of seasons, several villages or families meet in a ritual involving potlatches, battles, competitive singing, and sexual mingling. At such moments the social body realizes itself through the communal feast and voices its deepest wish in the cry of "Ten thousand years!"—whether applied to the Chief (as a prayer for his longevity) or to the community itself (which is presently exercising its own powers of perpetuation and unification).²³ "Ten thousand years!" celebrates the maintenance of a certain spatial order of things through indefinite time—the purpose of Chinese civilization.

The social efficacy of the alternating rhythm described by Granet has its pre-

²² Ibid., 83–84.

²³ Ibid., 96.

decessor in Durkheim. "Ce qui est à la base de la catégorie du temps, c'est le rythme de la vie sociale."²⁴ Summer, winter; isolation, assembly; separation and mingling of the sexes: the alternating rhythm of early Chinese society formats time as a regular, predictable pendulum-swing between opposites. And so, for Granet, a way of living creates the primordial rubrics of Yin and Yang, which it is always a mistake to treat as substances, categories, essences or functions. They are, rather, phases of a rhythm.

L'action concertante du Yin et du Yang... n'est point donnée comme ayant son principe dans le Yin et le Yang eux-mêmes. *Sa source est d'ordre social...* Le rythme a, non un *auteur*, mais une sorte de *régent responsable*... La qualité de régulateur du rythme universel est une prérogative princière.²⁵

To try to understand the leading rubrics of Yin and Yang as "categories" in the ordinary sense—as types of things or forces in nature—is to lose sight of the way they articulate space with time and invoke human collective action. "Le Yin et le Yang ont été appelés à organiser la matière du calendrier, parce que ces Emblèmes évoquaient avec une puissance particulière la conjugaison rythmique de deux aspects concrets antithétiques."²⁶ Behind the familiar, quasi-philosophical rubrics, Granet wants us to recover the image of a primordial feast at which rival groups competed for superiority in war, games, or song.

La conception du Yin et du Yang s'est ébauchée à l'occasion de spectacles dramatiques où jouaient et communiaient deux corporations solidaires et rivales, deux groupements complémentaires. L'assistance paraissait comprendre la totalité du groupe humain, et la totalité des choses de la nature, présentes ou évoquées, figurait à la fête. ... Ce spectacle total était un spectacle animé. Tant que durait le combat de danse et de poésie, les deux partis rivaux devaient faire alterner leurs chants.... Ce même ensemble embrasse et le monde naturel et le monde humain : il est, pour parler plus exactement, identique à la société totale qui groupe, en deux camps opposés, toutes les réalités concevables.²⁷

At a later stage, through a crucial transformation, the line separating the opposing teams transforms itself into the space of a Center, which will come to be occupied by a Chief; and "c'est au Chef qu'on rapporte les divisions du Monde," in an irreversible turn which will henceforth determine the structure of Chinese category-systems.²⁸ When the ancient Chinese said that the purpose of classification was to establish social order through the Rites,²⁹ they were only voicing a wisdom to be attained much later and through different paths, by Durkheim and Mauss.

²⁴ Emile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 26n1.

²⁵ Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, 108.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122–123. The image of symmetrical choirs alternating in competitive song and finally joining in sexual communion first emerges in Granet's *Fêtes et chansons anciennes de la Chine* (Paris: Leroux, 1919).

²⁸ Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, 303.

²⁹ For example in *Lunyu* (Analects of Confucius) 13.3, "名不正則言不順事不成則禮樂不興 If names are not correct, words do not follow... the tasks [of government] cannot be performed correctly, thus ritual and music will not arise," and the reworking of this passage in *Xunzi* 22, "Zheng ming 正名": "王者之制名, 名定而事辨, 道行而志通 When a [True] King fashions names, once the name is set, tasks are distinguished; the Way can then be enacted and the [gentleman's] will can be achieved" (Liang Qixiong 梁啟雄, ed., *Xunzi jianshi* 荀子集釋 [Taipei: Heluo, 1979], 310).

And so, working backwards from the evidence of categories, Granet fashions the sort of society to which the Chinese classificatory apparatus might correspond, and from which it could have emerged. As Granet's many critics have observed, this is hardly history.³⁰ But neither is it an irresponsible fantasy, given the rules of the Durkheimian game of social explanation; it is speculation expressing the need for a history, a serious kind of Just-So Story. It does not take for granted the category of "category" (as if it were sufficient or possible to line up in an exhibit Chinese categories, Greek categories, Hindu categories, etc., for purposes of comparison), any more than those of space and time. Rather, any attested set of categories has to be imagined as emerging from a particular history, from a particular people's social needs and collective ways of fulfilling them. The needs and at least some of the means are common to all humanity and form the object of sociological theory. Sinology contributes a study of the particular, Chinese, circumstances in which general human needs have been met. As Granet is reported to have said: "La Chine, je m'en fous. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est l'Homme."³¹

5.

Disciplines grow and change. They grow up in the shadow of other disciplines, break off, merge, supplant each other, play out their ratios of strength through individual careers and influences. In the youth of sociology and sinology, both disciplines had something to gain from one another, and so the investigation of "Chinese categories" was framed in a way that justified the sociology of China for what it brought both to sociology and to China study. By now, a hundred years after Durkheim and Mauss's "Sur quelques formes primitives de classification," neither sociology nor sinology depend so crucially on their mutual exchanges. And as a result—if I may hazard a bit of sociological determinism—investigations into the same phenomena now take a different tack. For many today, the purpose of investigating Chinese thinking is to discover an irreducible singularity, as if the calling of sinology were to fashion its own laws rather than sharing those of other social sciences.

Léon Vandermeersch, in a massive work devoted to tracing the "Royal Way" from its emergence in oracle bone inscriptions on down to its decay in the Warring States, attributes to traditional Chinese thought a "morpho-logical mentality" (*mentalité morpho-logicienne*), that is, a way of thinking that seeks to understand, not *where things come from* or *what they are for* but *how they are configured*. "When viewed

³⁰ From the start various Chinese scholars, among them Ding Wenjiang, accused Granet of ahistoricity in his combining of materials from different ages: see Rémi Mathieu, "Postface," in Granet, *La Civilisation chinoise* (1929 reprinted, Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 566. Robert Merton raised a different, sociological, objection: Granet 'considers traditionalized or ritualized or magical conceptions and implicitly compares these with our matter-of-fact, technical or scientific notions. But in a wide range of actual *practices*, the Chinese did not *act* on the assumption that 'time is round' and 'space, square.' ... The fallacy which is most prominent in Lévy-Bruhl's concept of the "prelogicality" of the primitive mind thus appears in the work of Granet as well.' "Paradigm for the Sociology of Knowledge," in James E. Curtis and John W. Petras, eds., *The Sociology of Knowledge: A Reader* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 356.

³¹ Quoted in Maurice Freedman, "Introduction" to Marcel Granet, *The Religion of the Chinese People*, trans. Maurice Freedman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 29.

according to our experience of suiting means to the end, the rites present a completely aberrant character," but the calculus of means and ends is alien to ritual thinking. This "thought which knows nothing of teleology and therefore knows nothing of freedom" expresses the morphology of its environment, whether this be the social environment in which people perform ritual acts or the cosmic one which ritual reflects: the glue that makes its parts cohere is "spontaneity, *ziran*," of a kind that eludes Western categories.³² Moreover, a ritual *morpho-logie*, an account of the spontaneous mutual coherence of things, is in Vandermeersch's view the deep logic of Chinese characters, of Chinese philosophy, of Chinese poetry. The same holds (according to François Jullien) of Chinese politics and society: this people "uninterested in cosmogonic legends or teleological suppositions," "instead of inventing *myths*... perfected *rites* which have the mission of embodying and expressing through signs, at the level of conduct, the functioning inherent to the disposition of the world."³³ Recalling the original emergence of the problem of "Chinese categorical thinking" in missionary writings on cultural contact, the current renditions of the topic make it a *specifically Chinese* problem and a problem in relation to *Westernness*.

To be sure, Marcel Granet also put ritual at the top of the Chinese hierarchy of knowledge. "To the degree that psychology and metaphysics existed in China, they had the function of glorifying Etiquette.... All the notions [of the early Chinese] are dominated by the ideas of rhythm and social authority."³⁴ But for Granet this privileging of ritual just makes the Chinese a particularly transparent, and self-avowed, case of a general rule in the sociology of knowledge.

The emphasis for Vandermeersch, Jullien and many other recent authors is rather on the Chinese singularity: ritual (or the correlative cosmology that serves it) elucidates the core of Chineseness and differentiates Chinese civilization, or Chinese thought patterns, from all others. The purpose of a sinology thus framed is to describe this special morphology as far as possible "from inside" it or "on its behalf." The funny thing about most ritual studies is that their definition of ritual as "embodying and expressing" a non-teleological, non-causal form of collective action carries over into their own argumentation, which likewise ceases to derive, explain or judge, but simply falls into step with, conforms itself to, the compelling power of a beautiful organizing scheme. Ritualism, to adopt a formulation of Catherine Bell's, "slips from being a tool for analysis to being a feature of the object and thereby validates an approach and a whole discourse."³⁵ One feels the need of a Granet who would not be satisfied with internal description, but would want to find origins and purposes for the beautiful patterns of ritual or correlative cosmology—and above all, would not be content to relegate it to a special world of "Chineseness." But as Sir Geof-

³² Léon Vandermeersch, *Wangdao ou la Voie Royale: Recherches sur l'esprit des institutions de la Chine archaïque* (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1977–80), vol. II, 285, 271.

³³ François Jullien, *La Propension des choses: pour une histoire de l'efficacité en Chine* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 236, 238.

³⁴ Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, 334. As early as 1931, critics were objecting to Granet's selection from different periods and types of Chinese thinking to make one great, synthetic ritual picture: see Rémi Mathieu, "Postface," in Granet, *La Civilisation chinoise* (1929; reprinted, Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 535–36, 566.

³⁵ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 46. In the original Bell's characterization applied to the term "performance."

frey Lloyd points out, “whatever credibility such talk [of mentalities] may have, it provides not even the beginnings of an explanation, but at most a statement of what has to be explained.”³⁶ Circularity is a real danger here. In order to resist the pull of this whirlpool wherein a ritual-centered approach to texts already informed by ritual imperatives can only confirm the “morpho-logical” organization of ritual cognition (and whatever else is assimilated to ritual), we need scholarship that starts from alien disciplines, asking, not only how Chinese ritually-based categories reflect general human tendencies but also how, when and under what conditions the Chinese ritual order emerged, and what media enabled it to take shape.³⁷ Discussions of “Chinese mentality” need to be subjected to the scrutiny of historians, sociologists, archaeologists, and so forth, and to broad registers of comparison (always seeking “mankind” but of course never finding it). Splendid isolation can be a particularly debilitating form of institutional strength.

This brief survey of the handling of the topic of “category” by a few authors in French sinology can do no more than suggest the need for reflection on the aims and conditions of our research. What are we seeking to understand, and for the sake of what? Cognition and perception are intentional in nature, as Franz Brentano long ago advanced (thereby founding phenomenology and perhaps also the sociology of knowledge)—they are acts performed about something and for the sake of something. The cognition of the category of category is no exception.

³⁶ G. E. R. Lloyd, *Adversaries and Authorities: Investigations into Ancient Greek and Chinese Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3, referring also to Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). On the dangers of taking a social-sciences approach, among them “determinism” and “relativism,” see *ibid.*, 225–27. Whether Lloyd’s broad profiles for Greek and Chinese science as fields of social endeavor—the one being fed by controversy, the other by consensus—entirely fulfills the hopes Durkheim and Mauss for the sociology of science is another question; at any rate these and other promised publications are sure to keep the discussion alive.

³⁷ Thus A. C. Graham, no friend of correlative cosmologies, observes that after the fertile early period of the “Hundred Schools,” the interests of the Chinese empire lay in “a unified world-view to back a politically unified world... [a] problem... solved at the start by the rapid adoption of the cosmology of the court astronomers and diviners... The Chinese choice is of an integrated solution of the problems both of placing oneself in the world and of manipulating it for one’s purposes...” (*Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* [La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989], 314–15). However scanty the details offered, this is at least the articulation of a socio-historical hypothesis relative to a determinate time and place. The historical origins of cosmological theories have received considerable scholarly attention in recent years, often drawing on both Chinese sources and comparative anthropological evidence: for an example, see Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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Violent Misreadings: The Hermeneutics of Cosmology in the *Huainanzi*

by
Michael Puett

During the Han dynasty, correlative cosmology came to be utilized as a hermeneutical strategy for re-interpreting earlier texts. As John Henderson has argued in regard to Confucian commentaries to the classics,

Although such cosmological dualities as *yin-yang* were probably not formulated in the first place to serve exegetical ends, they were developed through being widely used to support such commentarial assumptions as that the classics were well ordered and coherent. Cosmology is, after all, a science of order par excellence. Thus, the strategic use of cosmological ideas to establish the orderliness of classical discourse is not surprising.¹

Henderson goes on to provide an excellent survey of the complex ways that cosmology was utilized in commentaries.

Given that cosmology became such a dominant commentarial strategy, I would like to pose the following question: how could figures during this period have used correlative cosmology to read texts that would seem so obviously unconcerned with cosmological arguments? At first glance, this may seem like an odd question, since the answer would appear to be obvious: if people at the time believed that the cosmos operated in correlative ways, and if they believed that the texts of the sages were repositories of true knowledge, they would of course read such texts according to correlative schema. But, as I have argued elsewhere, correlative cosmology was not an assumption at all—even in the early Han.² It was rather a claim, and one that

¹ John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 163.

² Michael Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002).

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was hotly debated. There was thus a strong self-consciousness at the time that other people did not accept correlative ways of thinking. And what I would like to argue here is that was also a strong self-consciousness of the fact that some of the earlier texts—including those authored by figures recognized as great sages—did not use correlative ways of thinking either. There was, in short, a concern precisely with the disjunction—fully apparent to figures at the time—between earlier texts and the correlative cosmology that some Han figures were using to interpret those texts.

To tease out some of these issues, I will turn to a commentary in which, I will argue, the authors clearly recognized, and indeed played with, the discrepancy and incongruity of their cosmology with the text being commented upon. Indeed, the commentary is presented—celebrated might be the better word—as a deliberate and provocative misreading of the earlier text.

Cosmogonies and Commentaries: Hermeneutical Strategies of Cosmology in Early China

The text I will discuss is the “Chuzhen 俶真,” chapter two of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子—a text in which the argument is built to a significant degree upon particular (and seemingly peculiar) readings of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.³ Indeed, about 15% of the *Huainanzi* chapter consists of passages from the *Zhuangzi*,⁴ and substantial portions of the remainder of the chapter consist of lengthy elaborations of the *Zhuangzi* passages.

One of the most fascinating and provocative, as well as oft-discussed, of these elaborations occurs at the very beginning of the chapter. The text opens by quoting a passage from the “Qiwu lun 齊物論” of the *Zhuangzi*. The passage consists of seven lines:

有始也者
有未始有有始也者
有未始有夫未始有有始也者
有有也者
有无也者
有未始有无也者
有未始有夫未始有无也者

1. There was a beginning.
2. There was not yet beginning to have something beginning.
3. There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have something beginning.
4. There was Something.
5. There was Nothing.

³ I assigned the “Chuzhen” chapter of the *Huainanzi* in my graduate seminar “Chinese History 232: Topics in Han History” in the spring of 1995 and the fall of 1998. I would like to thank the participants of both seminars for their extremely helpful discussions. David Mozina in particular wrote an excellent seminar paper entitled “Cosmogonic Myth in the *Huainanzi*: An Analysis of Self-Cultivation and Rulership in the ‘Chuzhen.’”

⁴ Roger Ames, *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 215, note 36.

6. There was not yet beginning to have Nothing.

7. There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have Nothing.⁵

The text then provides a line-by-line commentary to that passage, building a lengthy cosmogony out of each sentence.

The commentary seems at first glance bizarre, to say the least. In the context of the “Qiwu lun,” the passage in question from the *Zhuangzi* seems clearly a critique of human attempts to posit origins and reified distinctions: if one says that something had a beginning, then one is saying that before such a beginning was something that was not yet that beginning. And before that there was yet another not yet beginning—and so on. Similarly, if one tries to distinguish between something and nothing, then there would have to be something that came before the very distinction of something and nothing. But then where did that something come from? And so on again. In other words, any attempt to posit origins, or to posit a distinction of “something” and “nothing,” leads only to nonsense. Allow me to quote the passage in full:

今且有言於此不知其與是類乎其與是不類乎
類與不類相與為類則與彼無以異矣
雖然請嘗言之
有始也者
有未始有始也者 有未始有夫未始有始也者
有有也者
有無也者
有未始有無也者
有未始有夫未始有無也者
俄而有無矣而
未知有無之果孰有孰無也
今我則已有謂矣而未知吾所謂之其
果有謂乎其果無謂乎

Now, I have something to say. I don't know if with this I am positing a category or not positing a category. But, since “positing a category” and “not positing a category” themselves involve creating a category, then there is nothing with which to distinguish them. Nonetheless, allow me to try to say it: “There was a beginning. There was not yet beginning to have something beginning. There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have something beginning. There was Something. There was Nothing. There was not yet beginning to have Nothing. There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have Nothing.” Suddenly we have Something and Nothing, but I don't yet know, with this Something and Nothing, which is Something and which is Nothing. Now, as for me, I have already referred to something, but I don't yet know if I have said something or if I have said nothing.⁶

The seven sentences are given within a larger frame designed to highlight the absurdity of the attempt to posit origins or maintain a dualism of “Something” and “Nothing.” As the narrator states, it is unclear, when one makes such a dualism,

⁵ *Zhuangzi*, “Qiwu lun,” Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series (hereafter cited as HY), 5/2/49–50. All translations in this paper are my own. My translation of this passage has been aided greatly by Burton Watson's, in his *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 38.

⁶ *Zhuangzi*, “Qiwu lun,” HY 5/2/47–51. My translation has benefitted from Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 38; and A. C. Graham, translator, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), 55.

which pole is which. Thus, the passage puns, has the narrator's discussion of Something and Nothing really said something or has it said nothing?

As A. C. Graham astutely comments on the passage,

There can be Nothing only when there is Something, a void only where there are objects with intervals between them, and both divide out from a whole which is neither one nor the other. Each thing has limited properties, is "without something," but the whole out of which it differentiates is both "without anything," since things have not yet emerged, and "without nothing," since everything emerges from it. Then having added Nothing to Something, I have still to add a remainder which "has not yet begun to be without something." But again we are speaking retrospectively as though there were already things to be present or absent, and again we have to negate: "There had not yet begun to be that 'not yet having begun to be without something.'" Both Zhuangzi's sequences are no doubt intended to lead to an infinite regress.⁷

But then we have the "Chuzhen" chapter of the *Huainanzi*. The chapter comments on the seven sentences by reading each one as referring to discrete stages in the cosmogonic unfolding of the universe. How are we to interpret such a commentary? It is not just that the authors are reading a cosmogony into a text that was unconcerned with cosmogony; they are reading a cosmogony into a text that seems obviously *opposed* to cosmogonic thinking—to any attempt, indeed, to posit discrete origins or clear cosmological distinctions such as "something" and "nothing."

Since the *Huainanzi* passage in question has often been celebrated as one of the most sophisticated and elaborate cosmogonies in early Chinese literature, it has generated a tremendous amount of scholarly attention.⁸ This has been made even more extreme by the fact that Han cosmogonies have themselves become so important in scholarship on early Chinese thought. Several scholars have emphasized cosmogonies such as those found in the *Huainanzi* as prototypical examples of correlative cosmology: since the cosmogonies given in the *Huainanzi* emphasize the notion that everything that exists emerged spontaneously out of a single, undifferentiated state, they are clearly reflective of a correlative cosmology, in which everything that exists is seen as inherently linked and in resonance with everything else. As Frederick Mote, who wants (wrongly, in my opinion⁹) to read such a cosmogony as part of a "Chinese" way of thinking, has argued:

The genuine Chinese cosmogony is that of organismic process, meaning that all the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process.¹⁰

And, since the *Huainanzi* cosmogonies are so elaborate, they are therefore often given as typical examples of Han correlative thought. A. C. Graham, for example,

⁷ Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 56. Here and throughout this paper I have converted all Wade-Giles romanizations to Pinyin.

⁸ Fung Yu-lan, for example, states that the *Huainanzi* cosmogonies, "explain the origin of the universe more clearly than do any earlier philosophical writings." He then quotes the passage in question as an example. See his *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, translated by Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 395–96.

⁹ For a critique of Mote's position, see Puett, *To Become a God*. I provide an account of the emergence of cosmogonies in early China (with texts such as the *Guodian Taiyi sheng shui*) on 145–200.

¹⁰ *Intellectual Foundations of China*, second edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1989), 15.



devotes a substantial part of his discussion of correlative thinking to one of the *Huainanzi* cosmogonies.¹¹

But, if the *Huainanzi* passage has been celebrated for its sophistication, the fact that it was written as a commentary to the *Zhuangzi* has been a problem. How can one account for the fact that such a complicated and lengthy cosmogony—a cosmogony that so many scholars want to celebrate as a high-point in the development of cosmological thinking—is written in response to a set of lines that appear to explicitly oppose any attempt to build a cosmogony?

This combination—a cosmogony that scholars want to celebrate along with an earlier set of lines that appear to contradict the premises of the cosmogony—makes it a powerful document in early Chinese literature, and one that brings to the fore many of the crucial questions facing any interpreter of cosmological thinking in early China. A survey of the ways in which twentieth-century scholars have read the *Huainanzi* passage in relation to the earlier *Zhuangzi* lines is extremely telling of the ways that correlative cosmology has been conceptualized by those scholars.

Secondary Scholarship

One of the major trends for the study of cosmological thought in early China has been a general “religion-to-philosophy” framework. The argument here is that cosmological thinking is an attempt to shift away from an earlier, theistic worldview and toward one based upon natural, rational laws. A clear example of this approach is Hu Shi, who read the *Huainanzi* as a high point in this development. Hu read the text as a whole as a naturalistic—and hence a rational—text, and he thus wanted to present the *Huainanzi* passage in question as a highly developed naturalistic cosmogony.

However, Hu Shi faced an immediate problem with this approach—and it is a problem that was to confront every scholar who hoped to read the passage as a cosmogony. The *Huainanzi* passage is written as a commentary to the *Zhuangzi* lines. As such, they simply do not add up to a coherent cosmogony: since the *Zhuangzi* lines are not in the order of a cosmogony, the *Huainanzi* commentary is not either. Accordingly, Hu Shi simply reordered the passage in order to fit a clearer developmental process. He thus ordered the passages as: 7, 3, 6, 2, 1, 4, and 5.¹² In other words, his attempt to read the cosmogony as a successful, convincing, naturalistic cosmogony was privileged over his desire to see the text as a commentary. Indeed, Hu Shi is unconcerned about the apparent disconnect between the passage and the *Zhuangzi* lines being commented upon.

Wing-Tsit Chan read the *Huainanzi*, as well as the development of the early Chinese philosophical tradition, very much along the lines developed earlier by Hu Shi. But unlike Hu Shi, Wing-Tsit Chan was explicitly interested in the relationship between the *Huainanzi* and *Zhuangzi* lines. Since Wing-Tsit Chan read *Zhuangzi* himself as a naturalistic philosopher, and hence as a figure pointing toward a more

¹¹ A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), 332–40.

¹² Hu Shi, *Huai-nan Wang shu* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yin shu guan, 1962), 33–37.

rational form of philosophy, Chan saw the *Huainanzi* cosmogony as simply a helpful, if somewhat derivative, continuation of that naturalistic and rationalistic approach:

Although his [i.e., Liu An's—the compiler of the *Huainanzi*] ideas are no more than reiteration and elaboration of Laozi and Zhuangzi, at least he kept the fire of Daoism burning and helped to make possible the emergence of Neo-Daoism. Because of his essentially rational approach to metaphysics and cosmogony, it may be said that he indirectly, at least, prepared for that rationalistic critic Wang Chong (27-100 AD).¹³

Chan thus read the cosmogony in question as simply an attempt to give Zhuangzi's initial passage a fuller content:

The seven stages were first mentioned by Zhuangzi but *Huainanzi* provided them with a content....*Huainanzi*'s view may not be scientific or logical. It is remarkable, however, that in an age of prevalent superstitions and common belief in prodigies, he should have maintained an absolutely naturalistic attitude toward creation.¹⁴

Thus, like Hu Shi, Chan emphasized the powerful cosmogony of the *Huainanzi*, and Chan explicitly read the passage as a successful elaboration of Zhuangzi. Indeed, Chan actually criticized the *Huainanzi* passage as being too derivative of the *Zhuangzi*.

Norman Girardot has also emphasized the links between the *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi* passages. Girardot argues that what he calls "early Daoism" was based upon a core mythology dealing with the origin of the cosmos out of chaos. According to such a view, the *Huainanzi* as a whole "might only be a more explicit extension of what was already implicit in both the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*."¹⁵ Girardot goes on to see the cosmogony given at the beginning of chapter two of the *Huainanzi* as a continuation of this core myth: "...there is a certain amount of syncretic supererogation, but the basic mythological structure is intact and can be extracted."¹⁶ Thus, the cosmogony, and indeed entire cosmology of the *Huainanzi*, is based upon a core myth that informed the *Zhuangzi* as well. Here too, then, the *Huainanzi* cosmogony is read as a continuation of the *Zhuangzi* passage. But, unlike Hu Shi and Wing-Tsit Chan, the continuation is read not as a growing development of naturalistic, rationalistic thought but rather as a common support for a single, core myth. And, because Girardot is committed to reading this same narrative structure as informing both texts, he does not re-order the sequence of the cosmogony but instead provides a lengthy and rather heroic defense of the *Huainanzi* passage as in fact representing a single cosmogony in the order given.¹⁷

In contrast to these readings that emphasize the continuity between the *Huainanzi* commentary and the *Zhuangzi* passage, several scholars have instead empha-

¹³ Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 305.

¹⁴ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 307.

¹⁵ N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: The Theme of Chaos* (hun-tun) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 137.

¹⁶ Girardot, *Myth and Meaning*, 150.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150–53.

sized the differences between the two texts. For example, Roger Ames sees the *Huainanzi* cosmogony as essentially a bad reading of the *Zhuangzi* passage. The *Huainanzi* authors, according to this view, just failed to understand the passage:

It cites the *Zhuangzi* 5/2/49 passage which in context is an illustration of the imprecise nature of language.... This *Huainanzi* passage restates the *Zhuangzi* discussion; but rather than associating it with the *Zhuangzi* concept of relativity, it interprets it literally as stages which can be defined in the genesis of things. The author makes a heroic attempt to make each cosmogonic stage progressively more recondite and obscure as he describes (1) beginning, (2) never beginning to have a beginning, and (3) never beginning to never begin to have a beginning. Not only does this *Huainanzi* passage add nothing to the *Zhuangzi*'s intended meaning, but it attempts to give precise definition to examples initially posited to demonstrate the imprecision of language!¹⁸

Charles Le Blanc notes a similar discrepancy between the *Huainanzi* and the *Zhuangzi* passages. Unlike Ames, however, Le Blanc celebrates the cosmogony. And, intriguingly, Le Blanc celebrates it within a framework in some ways quite similar to that employed by Hu Shi and Wing-Tsit Chan. Like Hu and Chan, Le Blanc reads the development of Warring States philosophy in terms of a progressive trend from religion and myth to philosophy. But, unlike Hu and Chan, Le Blanc sees the *Huainanzi* as a return to myth. Thus, Le Blanc presents the shift from the *Zhuangzi* to the *Huainanzi* as an example of a

reversal of the rationalizing trend that can be witnessed in some writings of the Former Han Dynasty (206 BC - 9 AD) which reinterpret formal concepts of classical Chinese philosophy in a kind of materialistic view of the universe.¹⁹

The two texts thus represent "two different mental attitudes."²⁰

However, since Le Blanc is committed to reading the *Huainanzi* passage as a convincing cosmogony, he also, like Hu Shi, attempts to re-order the passages. As he argues, "...the sequence followed by the *Huainanzi*, based on the seven propositions, does not seem to correspond to the successive stages of the formation of the universe."²¹ But, noting that Hu Shi's re-ordering does not really make sense,²² Le Blanc offers a different order: 7, 6, 5, 3, 2, 1, and 4.²³

Like Ames, then, Le Blanc emphasizes a discontinuity between the two texts. Unlike Ames, though, Le Blanc takes the *Huainanzi* passage seriously as a powerful cosmogony—to the point that the degree to which it is a commentary to the *Zhuangzi* is under-emphasized, and to the point even that the sequence is re-ordered to make it a better (or at least more narratively coherent) cosmogony. Indeed, Le Blanc hypothesizes that the cosmogony here may have already existed, and the

¹⁸ Ames, *The Art of Rulership*, 215, n. 36.

¹⁹ Charles Le Blanc, "From Ontology to Cosmogony: Notes on *Chuang Tzu* and *Huai-nan Tzu*," in *Chinese Ideas About Nature and Society: Studies in Honour of Derk Bodde*, edited by Charles Le Blanc and Susan Blader (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1987), 117.

²⁰ Le Blanc, "From Ontology to Cosmogony," 117.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 126. As Le Blanc points out, "Girardot's efforts to justify the succession of the seven stages according to the order of the seven propositions meet with considerable difficulties," (126, n. 18).

²² *Ibid.*, 126, n. 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 127–28.

Huainanzi passage may have simply been an attempt to artificially fit this cosmogony to the *Zhuangzi* lines: "It is not impossible that the seven stages pre-existed as an independent cosmogonic scheme which *Huainanzi* combined in an artificial way with the seven propositions."²⁴ Thus, like Girardot, Le Blanc tries to read the cosmogony as an earlier myth. But, whereas Girardot chose to see that cosmogonic myth as informing both texts, Le Blanc argues that the *Zhuangzi* represented a shift away from myth, while the *Huainanzi* represented a return to it.

Let us summarize the implications of this survey of the secondary literature. There is a clear pattern to these analytic frameworks. Those analysts who want to see correlative cosmology as a widespread assumption in early China have tended to emphasize the view that the *Huainanzi* passage is (despite appearances) an accurate reading of the earlier *Zhuangzi* lines, while those scholars who see correlative cosmology as a specifically Han (or late Warring States) development tend to emphasize the differences between the two passages. For the former scholars, both the *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi* sections represent either part of a progressive shift toward a rational, naturalistic way of thinking (Hu Shi and Chan) or a common belief in a deeply-rooted mythological worldview (Girardot). For the latter scholars, the *Huainanzi* represents either a shift away from the rationalistic beliefs in the Warring States period and toward an attempt to recover earlier mythical ideas (Le Blanc) or a simple misreading of the *Zhuangzi* lines (Ames). But, in all of the analyses discussed, the *Huainanzi* passage is read as a sophisticated cosmogony that reflects a basic belief at the time in a correlative system.

Phenomenology and Cosmogony in the *Huainanzi*

Let me begin by stating that I agree with Le Blanc and Ames that there is a clear and significant discrepancy between the *Zhuangzi* passage and the *Huainanzi* cosmogonic commentary: I think Chan's attempt to see the cosmogony as simply an elaboration on the *Zhuangzi* is unconvincing. We need to admit frankly that the *Huainanzi* passage is doing precisely what *Zhuangzi* is quite clearly saying we cannot do: posit beginnings as discrete moments. It is giving a narrative of origins as a commentary to a text that says it is wrong-headed to do so. But I will go one step further and argue that the authors were aware of the discrepancy and were actively playing on that discrepancy in order to develop their claims.

But I will also disagree with the various attempts to read the *Huainanzi* passage as an elaborate cosmogony. More specifically, I will disagree with Hu Shi and Le Blanc in their attempts to re-arrange the *Huainanzi* lines in order to fit their vision of how a proper cosmogony should operate. The fact that those scholars who wish to read the *Huainanzi* passage as a cosmogony are forced to re-arrange the lines is strong evidence that they are trying to do something that the *Huainanzi* authors were not. And the fact that those scholars trying to find a single, coherent cosmogony have ended up re-arranging the lines in completely different ways demonstrates

²⁴ Ibid., 126.

clearly that the text as stands does not, in spite of the grand claims so often made for it, make up a single cosmogony.

Why do the re-orderings fail? Precisely because the *Huainanzi* passage is given as a commentary: it begins by quoting the entire *Zhuangzi* passage, and then goes on to provide a line-by-line commentary to each sentence. Accordingly, the passage follows the *Zhuangzi*. And since the *Zhuangzi* passage is written in the form of two distinct lines of argument, so, therefore, is the commentary. It is not a single narrative sequence.

The fact that the authors of the *Huainanzi* passage are providing a commentary to the *Zhuangzi* passage, and are doing so at the expense of narrating a single coherent cosmogony, should force us to recognize that their interests lie elsewhere than in building a narrative of the beginnings of the cosmos. Instead, we have to start by trying to figure out why the authors would do this: why read the *Zhuangzi* passage in cosmogonic ways, and why give a "cosmogony" that seems to break from any clear narrative development?

Let us turn to the text. The chapter begins by quoting the *Zhuangzi* passage in full, so that is where we should begin as well. The first portion of the *Zhuangzi* passage is a direct regress:

有始也者
有未始有有始也者
有未始有夫未始有有始也者
There was a beginning.
There was not yet beginning to have something beginning.
There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have something beginning.²⁵

The passage begins by positing a beginning. But this can only be posited if there was something before that was not yet that beginning. This leads, as Graham pointed out, to an infinite regress.

The *Zhuangzi* passage then turns to an alternate line of argument:

有有也者
有无也者
有未始有无也者
有未始有夫未始有无也者
There was Something.
There was Nothing.
There was not yet beginning to have Nothing.
There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have Nothing.²⁶

Here, the cosmology is based upon a distinction between Something and Nothing—you and *wu*.²⁷ We do not know what texts the *Zhuangzi* was criticizing here, but we certainly know that relatively contemporary texts like the *Laozi* were developing cosmologies based upon precisely this distinction. Here too, the *Zhuangzi* argues, the cosmology is based upon reified terms that are, in fact, fully unstable. To posit

²⁵ *Zhuangzi*, "Qiwu lun," HY 5/2/49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, HY 5/2/49–50.

²⁷ I have translated *wu* as "nothing" in the sense of "no-thing": in other words, a purely undifferentiated state.

a Nothing, a total lack of differentiation, would also force one to posit something that came before that moment when Something and Nothing were split. And if one posits that moment that preceded the split of Something and Nothing, then there had to be an earlier state before that state as well—and so on to yet another infinite regress.

In short, the *Zhuangzi* is arguing that either of these two ways of accounting for the cosmos leads to an infinite regress. Both depend upon positing an earlier moment that was the beginning of the current order we know. And both therefore fail in the attempt to reify the transformational flux of the cosmos.

The *Huainanzi* commentary stays true to these distinct lines of argument. And this is precisely why the re-arrangements of the commentary fail: the re-orderings are an attempt to merge these two series into a single narrative—an effort that is doomed to result in nonsense, no matter how intelligently it is done. The point is that, when the *Zhuangzi* lines are worked out in cosmogonic fashion, you get two different cosmogonies, which work out differently. They cannot be intelligibly joined together as one narrative.

So let us now turn to the *Huainanzi* commentary. The text begins by quoting the *Zhuangzi* passage:

有始者有未始有有始者有未始有夫未始有有始者
 有有者有無者有未始有有無者
 There was a beginning.
 There was not yet beginning to have something beginning.
 There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have something beginning.
 There was Something.
 There was Nothing.
 There was not yet beginning to have Something and Nothing.²⁸

It then comments on each line in turn:

所謂有始者繁憤未發萌兆牙孽未有形（呼）
 〔郭〕（垠塹）無無蠕蠕將欲生興而未成物類
 The so-called “There was a beginning” refers to the time when the multitudinous sprouts had yet to emerge; when the boundaries between things had yet to take shape. Enclosed, bounded, undifferentiated, yet beginning to wriggle; there was a desire to be generated and grow, but things and types had not yet been formed.²⁹

If one posits a beginning to this world, it would be the point at which distinct things had yet to emerge.

²⁸ *Huainanzi*, “Chuzhen,” Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies, Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (hereafter cited as ICS), 2/10/14–15. In this initial quotation, the *Huainanzi* only gives six sentences. In the ensuing commentary, it does give all seven. Also: in the sixth line, as well as in the commentaries to lines six and seven, an additional *you* appears, thus yielding the phrases, “not yet beginning to have Something and Nothing.” It is therefore even clearer here that the sixth line would refer to that which preceded the distinction of Something and Nothing.

²⁹ *Huainanzi*, “Chuzhen,” ICS, 2/10/15–16. My translation of the full passage has been aided greatly by the translation given by Chan, *Sourcebook*, 306–7.

Now the next line:

有未始有有始者天氣始下地氣始上
陰陽錯合相與優游競暢于宇宙之間
被德含和繡粉龍從欲與物接而未成兆朕

"There was not yet beginning to have something beginning" refers to when the *qi* of Heaven began to descend and the *qi* of Earth began to ascend. The *yin* and *yang* mixed and merged, wrangling and expanding in the space of the cosmos. Covering power (*de*) and containing harmony, confused and chaotic, they desired to connect with things, but they had not yet formed.³⁰

The next step back from that point before distinct things had begun to emerge would be the mating of the *qi* of Heaven and the *qi* of Earth.

And the period before that would have been when Heaven and Earth had not yet begun to mate:

有未始有夫未始者有有始者天含和而未降
地懷氣而未揚虛無寂寞蕭條霄壤無有仿佛
氣遂而大通（宜宜）〔冥冥〕者也

"There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have something beginning" refers to when Heaven contained harmony and had not yet descended; earth embraced *qi* and had not yet ascended. Empty, still, and dark, the differentiated and the undifferentiated were similar. *Qi* spread out and penetrated the obscurity.³¹

The commentary then turns to the second line of argument. Unlike the first, based on a regression into the formation of things through the mating of the *qi* of Heaven and Earth, the second is based upon the distinction of *you* and *wu*. We begin with the commentary to the first line of this second argument:

有有者言萬物摻落根莖枝葉青蔥苓龍（萑萑）〔確屈〕炫煌
蠓飛蠕動蚊行噲息可切循把握而有數量

"There was Something" speaks of the myriad things emerging. The stems, branches, and stalks were bright and luminous. Insects flew and crawled about. They could be touched, grasped, and counted.³²

You refers to the differentiated world, when the myriad things had already emerged. *Wu* refers to when one instead views the world in its undifferentiated state:

有無者視之不見其形聽之不聞其聲捫之不可得也
望之不可極也儲與屈（治）〔治〕浩浩瀚瀚
不可隱儀揅度而通光耀者

"There was Nothing" refers to when one could look at it but not see its form, listen to it but not hear its sounds, grasp it but not obtain it; gaze at it but not see its limit. Collected and fused; so vast it could not be measured, and yet it penetrated the brightness.³³

However, if one can speak of Something and Nothing, then some state must have come earlier that could then give birth to Something and Nothing:

³⁰ Ibid., 2/10/16–17.

³¹ Ibid., 2/10/17–19.

³² Ibid., 2/10/21–22.

³³ Ibid., 2/10/22–23.

有未始有有無者包裹天地陶冶萬物大通混冥
 深閎廣大不可為外析毫剖芒不可為內
 無環堵之宇而生有無之根

"There was not yet beginning to have Something and Nothing" refers to the encompassment of Heaven and Earth and the molding of the myriad things. The Great Penetration was dark. Deep and vast, nothing existed outside it. Even the tiniest hair or sharpest point could not fit within it. A space without walls, it gave birth to the root of Something and Nothing.³⁴

But then there would have to be a state that preceded that state as well:

有未始有夫未始有有無者天地未剖陰陽未判四時未分
 萬物未生汪然平靜寂然清澄莫見其形

"There was not yet beginning to have a not yet beginning to have Something and Nothing." refers to when Heaven and Earth had not yet split apart; *yin* and *yang* had not yet been cleaved; the four seasons had not yet been distinguished; the myriad things had not yet been born. Even and still, no one could see its form.³⁵

Just as two separate cosmogonic claims are ridiculed in the *Zhuangzi*, so are two cosmogonies posited in the commentary. The first is worked out in terms of the mating of the *qi* of Heaven and Earth, and the second is worked out in terms of the interplay of Something and Nothing. This is not to say that the cosmogonies directly contradict each other: both argue for a monistic cosmos—a cosmos in which, ultimately, everything is inter-related. But the cosmogonies are worked out differently.

So what are the authors doing here? The authors appear to be arguing that one can begin with either of these starting points: either a positing of origins or the positing of a distinction between Something and Nothing. Either way, one can then work backward to the point when absolutely everything is seen as fully and inherently linked—not just seen as undifferentiated, but as even so linked that the very distinction of differentiated and undifferentiated is obliterated.

In a sense, then, cosmogony is not even the right word for this. It is perhaps better explicated as a phenomenology. The *Huainanzi* commentators are not providing a narrative of how the cosmos actually began—since, after all, there are *two* different narratives. The starting point is rather with the narrator. The narrator begins with two different starting points, and, from these different starting points, works backward in two different ways. But the goal of the reconstruction is the same in both: the reconstruction allows us to see how the differentiated but inter-acting objects of the world once were one. The implication would appear to be that one could in fact start anywhere—with any point, in any situation—and undertake the same reconstruction. And the goal of the exercise would be to allow the practitioner to see that how all things are ultimately and fully inter-related.

To use an imperfect analogy, the move here is somewhat reminiscent of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel's argument was not that human thought actually developed in the way that it is recounted in the *Phenomenology*; the account, after all, is not at all in chronological order. The argument is rather that, if one starts from the vantage of the Absolute Spirit and looks backward from that point, then one would

³⁴ Ibid., 2/10/23–25.

³⁵ Ibid., 2/10/25–26.

reconstruct the development in the way described. As with the *Huainanzi* passages, the concern is not to posit claims for the actual development; the concern is with working backward from one's current position and showing the ultimate linkage of all that exists.

But the differences with Hegel's *Phenomenology* are equally telling. The *Phenomenology* could only have been written at the point in the development of consciousness when Absolute Spirit had been achieved. The *Phenomenology* is then a recollection by the Absolute Spirit of that development. In the *Huainanzi* chapter in question, however, the argument moves otherwise. The recollection can be done at any moment. And it is precisely the act of working backward from any given starting-point that allows one fully to see oneself linked with the cosmos. Accordingly, the narrative proceeds in the opposite way of the *Phenomenology*. Instead of starting at the beginning of the process and tracing the development toward Absolute Spirit, the text starts from any given point and works backward. It is thus through the process itself that one becomes, to continue my imperfect analogy, like an Absolute Spirit, moment by moment doing what Hegel would say only the Absolute Spirit could do at the end of the developmental process.

The goal, then, is not to explain how the universe actually began. The goal is for the practitioner to undertake such a phenomenological reconstruction in order to allow him to understand that the cosmos is monistic—that everything experienced currently as differentiated is in fact ultimately part of a single, unified cosmos with a single origin (even if our reconstructions back to that origin will always differ based on the point from which we begin the exercise).

But then why would the authors of the *Huainanzi* chapter build such an argument through a commentary to the *Zhuangzi* passage? At this stage, it might appear that the commentary is serving as a refutation of the *Zhuangzi* passage: the authors are trying to demonstrate that they can do exactly what the *Zhuangzi* said could not be done. According to this reading, indeed, it might appear the *Huainanzi* authors are claiming themselves superior to *Zhuangzi*.

In fact, though, I think they may be up to something very different. Let us return to the text. The next line reads:

若光燿之閒於無有退而自失也

It was like bright light between Nothing and Something, retreating and becoming lost.³⁶

The line is then followed by a partial quotation from a passage in chapter twenty-two of the *Zhuangzi*:

曰予能有無而未能無也及其為無無至妙何從及此哉

I am able to make Something of Nothing (*you wu*), but I have not be able to make Nothing of Nothing (*wu wu*). When it comes to making Nothing of Nothing (*wu wu*) – how could I obtain this?³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., 2/10/26–27.

³⁷ Ibid., 2/10/27. I have translated to keep *Zhuangzi*'s pun on Something and Nothing (*you* and *wu*)—perhaps at the risk of straining the intelligibility of the passage. A more straightforward translation would simply give the verbal usages of *you* and *wu* as "to possess" and "to discard" respectively: "I am able to have Nothing (*you wu*), but I have not be able to discard Nothing (*wu wu*). When it comes to discarding Nothing (*wu wu*)—how could I obtain this?" But then we have lost the pun.

Because of the quotation, several commentators to the *Huainanzi* chapter have recommended an emendation in the above line—changing *jian* (閒) to *wen* (問). As in the *Zhuangzi* parallel passage, “bright light” and “Nothing and Something” would be read as characters, and the line would thus read: “It was like Bright Light asking Nothing-Something...” With such an emendation, the section would be a partial parallel to the full *Zhuangzi* passage in chapter twenty-two, which I will here quote in full:

光曜問乎無有曰夫子有乎其无有乎
光曜不得問而孰視其狀貌窅然空然
終日視之而不見聽之而不聞搏之而不得也
光曜曰至矣其孰能至此乎
予能有无矣而未能无无也
及為无有矣何從至此哉

Brightlight asked Nothing-Something (*wu you* 无有), “Sir, are you Something (*you*), or have you made Nothing of Something (*wu you*)? Receiving no answer, Brightlight stared at his countenance. It was blank and empty. He stared at it all day but could not see; listened to it but could not hear; reached for it but could not obtain it. Brightlight said, “The utmost! Who could attain this? I am able to make Something of Nothing (*you wu*), but I have not be able to make Nothing of Nothing (*wu wu*). When it comes to making Nothing of Something (*wu you*)—how could I obtain this?”³⁸

Although I certainly agree that the *Huainanzi* authors are playing on the *Zhuangzi* passage, the emendation to the *Huainanzi* passage seems to me unnecessary. As Wing-Tsit Chan has correctly argued, “There is no need to change *jian* (space) to *wen* (to ask) in order to conform to the story of Light asking Non-being in *Zhuangzi* 22.”³⁹ But whereas Chan would deny the emendation in order to maintain his reading of the passage as simply a naturalistic cosmology, I would again read it as a careful employment of the *Zhuangzi* passage. As such, the passage describes Brightlight, undergoing the process just described, trying to dispense with his continuing attachment to the differentiated world:

若光曜之閒於無有退而自失也
曰予能有無而未能無無也及其為無無至妙何從及此哉

It was like Brightlight alternating between Nothing and Something (*wu you*), retreating and becoming lost. He said, “I am able to make Something of Nothing (*you wu*), but I have not be able to make Nothing of Nothing (*wu wu*). When it comes to making Nothing of Nothing (*wu wu*)—how could I obtain this?”⁴⁰

Brightlight is thus describing his attempt to undergo precisely the process described in the text: to work backward to seeing everything as interlinked. He has been able to achieve *wu* (lack of differentiation), but has not yet reached the point of being able to discard the notion of *wu* itself. And he cannot yet imagine dispensing with such a notion.

The authors then turn to a passage taken directly from the *Zhuangzi*, chapter six⁴¹:

³⁸ *Zhuangzi*, HY 60/22/65–69.

³⁹ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 307, n. 8.

⁴⁰ *Huainanzi*, “Chuzhen,” ICS, 2/10/26–27.

⁴¹ *Zhuangzi*, HY 16/6/24–25.

夫大塊載我以形勞我以生逸我以老休我以死
善我生者乃所以善我死也

The Great Clod supports me with a form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, and gives me rest with death. That I esteem my life is thus the same reason that I esteem my death.⁴²

Here again, the reader is called upon to think of an undifferentiated state in order to avoid valuing particular aspects of the life process over another.

The *Huainanzi* continues by quoting the subsequent narrative in chapter six of the *Zhuangzi* about hiding a boat: if one hides a boat, it may still be stolen. But, if one hides all under Heaven in all under Heaven, then it can never be stolen.⁴³ In other words, one should not define particular aspects of the differentiated world as one's own but instead think of oneself as linked to the full cosmos.

After the opening sequence, the ensuing passages are taken directly from the *Zhuangzi*, and are clearly quoted favorably. This would push us strongly against an interpretation of the opening section as simply being a rejection of *Zhuangzi*. On the contrary, the authors of the *Huainanzi* chapter clearly hold *Zhuangzi* in esteem. The anecdotes quoted from the *Zhuangzi* are uniformly used in a fully positive way to show the importance of placing oneself in the larger cosmos and of seeing oneself inherently linked to the larger cosmos. In short, the authors are portraying *Zhuangzi* as being a figure who accurately understood the necessity of seeing oneself as fully linked to the cosmos.

The disagreement with *Zhuangzi* comes down to the approach that one should use to attain such a linkage. In terms of the opening commentary: *Zhuangzi* argued that positing any point (in this case, a starting point), or any dualism (in this case, Something and Nothing) forces one to reify and lose a sense of the endless transformations with which one is always engaged. The *Huainanzi* authors are arguing that it works the other way: from any point we can accurately work backward and recognize the inherent inter-relationship of all that exists. And we can thus do what *Zhuangzi* accurately realized we must do—see ourselves as linked to the endless flux of the cosmos and act in harmony with that flux at any moment. In other words, the *Huainanzi* authors are arguing that *Zhuangzi* was, by trying to link himself with the movements of the cosmos, profoundly right, but that in another sense he was profoundly wrong: he opposed the very method—namely, “cosmogonic” reconstruction—that can enable one to accomplish what *Zhuangzi* accurately realized needed to be accomplished. As a result, *Zhuangzi*'s linkage with the larger cosmos was only done intuitively, and his insights were thus never universalizable. But the *Huainanzi* authors are arguing that they understand how to universalize what *Zhuangzi* intuitively understood. The method is the experience of reconstructing the origin of all that is—precisely the thing that *Zhuangzi* warned against.

The overall point here is that there are Heavenly patterns with which the sage accords, and *Zhuangzi* accurately sensed this. But whereas *Zhuangzi* thought you did so by moving beyond positing single origin points or cosmological distinctions (“Something/Nothing”), the *Huainanzi* argues that you do the opposite: endlessly

⁴² *Huainanzi*, “Chuzhen,” ICS, 2/10/29–2/11/1. My translation has been helped by Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 80.

⁴³ *Zhuangzi*, HY 16/6/25–26.

working backward from those points or those distinctions in a larger phenomenological reconstruction of the ultimate inter-linkage of everything. And, by doing so, one accomplishes precisely what Zhuangzi accurately realized should be accomplished—even if Zhuangzi himself could never explain how to do it.

This may help to explain the relationship of the *Huainanzi* in general to the *Zhuangzi*. Several of the chapters—just as in chapter two—are built out of passages in the *Zhuangzi*. But, unlike Laozi, who is often quoted favorably by name in the *Huainanzi*, Zhuangzi is never mentioned as an authority. As Charles Le Blanc has argued:

We know that the influence of the *Zhuangzi* on the *Huainanzi* is even more pervasive and decisive than that of the *Laozi*. Yet the *Zhuangzi* is never treated as an authority: quotations from the *Zhuangzi* are constantly tampered with, nor these “incomplete quotations” acknowledged as deriving from the *Zhuangzi*.⁴⁴

The apparent paradox may be explained by the *Huainanzi*’s overall strategy: by providing a full cosmological framework, the text can claim to explicate and make universalizable what Zhuangzi intuitively understood.

Indeed, this is a consistent strategy within the text as a whole. Chapter 21, the postface to the work, operates the same way: the explicit claim is that the *Huainanzi* is a work that is fully universalizable. Earlier figures may have accurately given proper advice at certain moments in history, but the *Huainanzi* is a text that can be used for all times and all places. And the reason for this is that the *Huainanzi* is based upon an understanding of universal, cosmic principles:⁴⁵

若劉氏之書觀天地之象
通古今之事
權事而立制度形而施宜...
故置之尋常而不塞
(市) [布] 之天下而不窺

The book of Mister Liu observes the images of Heaven and Earth, penetrates the affairs of ancient times and the present, weighs affairs and establishes regulations, measures forms and puts forth what is fitting....Therefore, one can establish it regularly and constantly and never be blocked; one can promulgate it throughout all under Heaven and never make a mistake.⁴⁶

Because the *Huainanzi* is based upon universal, cosmic principles, anyone can follow the teachings included in the work and understand how to act properly. In terms of the issues at hand for this paper, this would imply that, while Zhuangzi was able to move within the Heavenly patterns, he could never have made this universalizable for anyone else. The *Huainanzi* authors are arguing that they can.

⁴⁴ Charles Le Blanc, “Reinterpretation of Traditional Chinese Thought in the *Huai-Nan-Tzu*: A Case of Source Study,” *Asian Thought and Society* 3.9 (December 1978): 268. See also the excellent discussion in Kanaya Osamu, *Rôsô teki sekai: Enanji no shisô* (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoden, 1959).

⁴⁵ For a fuller discussion of this point, see Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 159–60. See also the excellent discussion in Griet Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An’s Claim to Moral Authority* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ *Huainanzi*, “Yaolüe,” ICS, 21/228/28–31.

Conclusion

What we see here is something very powerful and perhaps a bit disconcerting. The *Huainanzi* authors were not assuming that Zhuangzi was really providing a cosmogony, nor were they simply misunderstanding Zhuangzi. And they were not even claiming that Zhuangzi was wrong—that Zhuangzi mistakenly thought cosmogony to be impossible, while these authors are claiming that it is possible. I am suggesting instead that perhaps the argument is actually that, through cosmology, they understood Zhuangzi better than Zhuangzi himself did. Or, to be more specific, that they understood the profundity of Zhuangzi's insight while also recognizing—in a way that Zhuangzi never did—how those insights were achieved and how others could also achieve them. In other words, the *Huainanzi* authors were arguing, Zhuangzi was right, but, in his opposition to cosmological statements, Zhuangzi was also wrong—failing to understand the cosmology within which his accurate insights were achieved.

I have presented this reading in opposition to several other explanations of the passages in question. In all of these previous discussions, correlative cosmology was treated—at least implicitly—as an assumption, and the question for the interpreters was to understand the relationship between that cosmology assumed by the *Huainanzi* authors and the *Zhuangzi* passage—whether that be through a shift from religion to naturalistic philosophy, as a common commitment to a core myth of chaos and cosmos, or as a return from philosophy to a mythical way of thinking. As a consequence, scholars have consistently failed to recognize the degree to which the authors of the *Huainanzi* were themselves problematizing their relationship to earlier texts. In the case at hand, the mistake of all of these discussions is that they have failed to recognize the degree to which the *Huainanzi* authors are presenting their arguments in terms of a complex positioning of themselves vis-à-vis Zhuangzi.

I suspect this point can be made more broadly for many of the ways that correlative cosmology has been discussed for early China. All too often it has been presented as an assumption—whether that be as a deep-rooted cultural belief or the result of a general shift in thinking from religion to naturalism. In the former case, early Han cosmology is read as a sophisticated development of an earlier belief system; in the latter case, the early Han authors are read as naively (and incorrectly) reading their beliefs into earlier texts. But, either way, early Han texts are read as if the authors are passive believers in a correlative system.

As I have argued elsewhere, however, cosmological views were *arguments* in the early Han, not assumptions.⁴⁷ And, as I have argued here, at least some of the authors in the early Han were fully aware that, when they read earlier texts according to cosmological schema, they were using schema that those authors were not using themselves.

And this brings us back to the question with which I began this paper. What I would like to suggest is that such a question should be posed not just occasionally but in fact frequently to a number of Han texts. We should not think that the only way to respect the beliefs of Han authors is to read them as assuming their cosmo-

⁴⁷ Puett, *To Become a God*.

logical ideas to have been held by the authors they are commenting upon. Sometimes they did; but here we have a case not only where they did not but in fact where that discrepancy is, I would argue, emphasized strongly as a key argument in the text. At least some of the proponents of cosmological thinking in the early Han were fully self-conscious of the fact that they were articulating a framework not held by earlier figures—even by earlier sages. And if we fail to recognize this self-consciousness, we will also fail to recognize many of the complex ways and reasons that cosmological systems were utilized, as well as some of the complex strategies that were employed to deal with the recognized discrepancies and discontinuities separating them from their predecessors.

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Neurobiology, Layered Texts, and Correlative Cosmologies:

A Cross-Cultural Framework for Premodern History

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Introduction/Abstract

This theoretical paper combines neurobiological and textual evidence to develop a cross-cultural model of the evolution of correlative systems.² The paper argues that claims that correlative thought was in some way unique to China have seriously impeded comparative studies; known by other names, correlative tendencies were no less prominent (and were sometimes more extreme) in premodern India, the Middle East, the West, and Mesoamerica than in China. Below, we discuss some factors that have led to varying degrees of interest in correlative thought in different fields; arguments are given that parallel developments in correlative cosmologies provide a potent cross-cultural framework for premodern studies in general. Our model pictures the growth of “high-correlative” systems—multileveled reflecting cosmologies, nested hierarchies, abstract systems of correspondences, and similar developments—as byproducts of exegetical processes operating in layered textual traditions over extended periods; the origins of primitive correlative thought and related animistic ideas seen at the earliest levels of those traditions, “worked up” abstractly in later strata, are tied in our model to neurobiological data. The union of neurobiological and textual evidence reviewed in our paper allows the construc-

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² For anticipations of some topics discussed below, see S.A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems* (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998); John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998); Michael Witzel, *On Magical Thought in the Veda*, Inaugural Address, University of Leiden (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1979); “Macrocosm, Mesocosm, and Microcosm: The Persistent Nature of ‘Hindu’ Beliefs and Symbolic Forms,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 1(13) (December, 1998): 501–53; and “The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu,” in Michael Witzel, ed., *Inside the Texts, Beyond the Texts: New Approaches to the Study of the Vedas*, Opera Minora, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard Oriental Series, 1997), 256–345. See also the further collaborative study referenced in note 15.

tion of evolutionary models of the growth of premodern religious and philosophical systems, most of which acquired elaborate correlative features over time; the model links fluctuations in these developments to shifts in literate technologies and other factors affecting premodern textual flows. Part of our paper describes novel methods for studying these developments in a broad class of computer simulations; to our knowledge, ours is the first theory of the evolution of religious and philosophical ideas capable of being implemented and partially tested in such simulations.³ The conclusion of our paper discusses a number of historical tests of our model; special emphasis is placed on challenges the model raises to popular claims that extensive manuscript traditions existed in the later Shang and Western Zhou dynasties—or, even earlier, in ancient India's oldest civilization, in the Indus Valley.

A brief cross-cultural survey of correlative systems

Ever since the publication of Marcel Granet's *La Pensée chinoise*, in 1934, specialists on premodern China have paid close attention to what Joseph Needham was to later label "correlative thinking"—referring to a general propensity to organize natural, political/social, and cosmological data in highly ordered arrays or systems of correspondence.⁴ While the most intense discussion of correlative thought has occurred in Chinese studies, similar tendencies can be identified in every traditional civilization known. Correlative structures show up world wide in premodern magical, astrological, and divinational systems; in the designs of villages, cities, temples, and court complexes; in abstract orders of gods, demons, and saints; in formal numerological systems; in hierarchical and temporal cosmologies; and in many similar phenomena. The idea that reality consists of multiple "levels," each mirroring all others in some fashion, is a diagnostic feature of premodern cosmologies in general; tracing this idea from its primitive origins to its modern decline is one of the major challenges faced by specialists in premodern thought.

One of the simplest forms of correlative thought lay in the realistic links typically posited between objects and words or visual symbols in primitive magical-ritual systems; the cross-cultural similarities in those systems suggest that the deepest roots of correlative thought lay in neurobiological processes, a point to which we will return. Establishment of word-object correlations was guided by matters of gross resemblance and intense etymological speculation; classic examples are found in early divinational treatises like the *Yijing* or in the magical formulae of the *Atharvaveda*

³ A fuller technical report on those simulations can be downloaded as a PDF file from <http://www.safarmer.com/simulations.pdf>.

⁴ Key studies include Marcel Granet, *La Pensée chinoise* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1934); Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2: *History of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); Manfred Porkert, *The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine: Systems of Correspondences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973); Henderson, *Development and Decline* (1984); A. C. Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986) and *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), 313–82; Richard J. Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); John Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); Nathan Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55(1) (June, 1995): 5–37; Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also note 18 on the views of Granet's teachers Durkheim and Mauss, and note 13 for two of Bernhard Karlgren's classic papers in the *BMFEA*, which have heavily influenced later studies of correlative thought.

and Egyptian funereal texts. While a number of motifs show up globally in correlative systems—including heaven/earth distinctions, astrological correspondences, and man-the-microcosm concepts—ethnographic field studies suggest that the detailed contents of those systems typically arose from idiosyncratic shamanic and/or dream experiences; the result is that it is impossible to predict the exact forms of correlative thought that emerge even in primitive societies existing in nearly identical ecological and social conditions.⁵ One object of this paper is to illuminate the mechanisms that helped stabilize different types of correlative systems in stratified textual traditions.

Increasingly abstract correlative systems, often associated with primitive dichotomies (Brahman/Ātman, heaven/earth, yin/yang, limited/unlimited, being/becoming, etc.) began to take shape throughout the Old World in early periods of textual expansion in the last half of the first millennium BCE; frequently the mythic origins of these dualistic orders can be detected not far beneath the surface.⁶ Almost upon formation, these orders began fusing with more elaborate systems of correspondences relating directions, colors, sounds, tastes, smells, ritual meters, social/political orders, virtues, vices, gestures, and similar phenomena. These systems typically grew quickly through fusions with abstract enumeration orders emerging in the same era—including the *wuxing* or “five phases” in China, the four element and humor models in the West, and the three humor model in India. Typically, an originally broader range of competing orders—including, for example, five or six or even more elements—was stabilized within a few centuries into more or less standard regional sets. We will argue later that the combined action of repetitive exegetical and dissipative forces in layered textual traditions predictably led to stabilization of this sort; by the end of the first millennium BCE, these forces had already generated deep “path dependencies” in traditions that would influence cultural developments in broad geographical regions for thousands of years.⁷

By the early common era, the dominant types of correlative systems had already emerged that would guide cosmological thinking throughout traditional times. Increasingly complex scholastic systems continued to develop within the limits defined by these frameworks from late-ancient through early-modern history. Prominent byproducts included so-called Neo-Confucian and Neo-Platonic systems and related structures in post-classical Daoist, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian thought; correlative systems of similar if less abstract types also evolved in heavily layered pre- and post-Columbian Mesoamerican traditions. These systems tended to emerge most rapidly in times of political integration or broadened foreign

⁵ See, e.g., Fredrik Barth's groundbreaking study of ritual variation in neighboring tribes in New Guinea, *Cosmologies in the Making: A Generative Approach to Cultural Variation in Inner New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Barth's work undermines socially deterministic models of the sort associated with Durkheim, Mauss and their followers, including Granet (but cf. here also note 18). On the role of dreams in generating these systems, see Michele Stephen's study of the remarkable Mekeo tribes of New Guinea, *A'aisa's Gifts: A Study of Magic and the Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁶ For one study of cosmological developments involving dualistic concepts of this sort, see Holger Thesleff, *Studies in Plato's Two-Level Model*, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 113 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1999).

⁷ The concept of path dependencies is closely related to general models of complex systems discussed later in this paper; the concept originally arose from studies of similar stabilizing forces in the evolution of economic systems. See W. Brian Arthur, “Competing Technologies, Increasing Returns, and Lock-in by Historical Events,” *Economic Journal* 99 (1989): 642–65 and “Complexity and the Economy,” *Science* 284 (2 April 1999): 107–09. These and closely related studies can be downloaded from <http://www.santafe.edu/arthur/Papers/Papers.html>.

contact or in harmony with developments in literate technologies that accelerated textual flows. In the most advanced traditions, repeated syncretic fusions of sources over long periods eventually led to the emergence of systems with highly exaggerated correlative properties (known in mathematics as “self-similar” or “fractal” structures) in which every part of the cosmos was said to mirror every other. The links between the development of extreme high-correlative systems and syncretic processes is suggested by the fact that similarly structured systems emerged in China, India, the Middle East, Europe, and Mesoamerica whenever information flows increased and tendencies to harmonize traditions reached extremes.

By late-traditional times, abstract correlative systems were often embodied in charts whose structures are remarkably similar to those seen in modern periodic tables; direct influences can, in fact, sometimes be traced between their premodern and their modern forms. One extreme Western chart, dating from the end of the traditional era, is shown in **Figure 1**. Similar if less extreme examples, organized in temporal as well as hierarchical fashions, show up regularly in the evolving literate traditions of premodern China, India, the Middle East, and Mesoamerica.

Studies of correlative systems outside Sinology

A large body of evidence demonstrates that correlative systems evolved in similar ways in different world civilizations. This suggests that comparative study of those systems might provide a cross-cultural framework for modeling the evolution of the religious and philosophical ideas embedded in those systems, whose structural similarities are masked by differing scholastic terminologies. Unfortunately, correlative systems have never been investigated in other fields with the same intensity seen in Chinese studies, with the result that comparative research of this sort remains badly undeveloped.

Raw materials on which to build such a framework are not lacking. Especially rich evidence on the early stages of high-correlative thought survives in early Vedic traditions, preserved in heavily layered texts from the middle third of the first millennium BCE that vastly outnumber extant Chinese and Greek sources from the same period. Correlative ideas in Vedic traditions, often (but not exclusively) referred to as “*bandhus*” (*bandhu* = relation, bond, connection, etc.) have been discussed by a long line of Indologists including Lévi, Oldenberg, Schayer, Belvalkar and Ranade, Renou, Gonda, Benke, Parpola, Witzel, Smith, Wezler, and Olivelle.⁸

⁸ On what we can term correlative thought in Vedic traditions, see, e.g., Sylvain Lévi, *La Doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898), esp. 10–12; Hermann Oldenberg, *Vorwissenschaftliche Wissenschaft: Die Weltanschauung der Brāhmaṇa-texte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1919); Stanislaw Schayer, “Die Struktur der magischen Weltanschauung nach dem Atharva-Veda und den Brāhmaṇa-Texten,” *Zeitschrift für Buddhismus* 6 (1925): 259–99; S.K. Belvalkar and R.D. Ranade, *History of Indian Philosophy: The Creative Period*, Vol. 2 (Poona: Belvakunja Publishing House, 1927); Louis Renou, “‘Connexion’ en védique, ‘cause’ en bouddhique,” in *Dr. C. Kunhan Raja Presentation Volume* (Madras: Adyar Library, 1946), 55–60; Jan Gonda, “Bandhus in the Brāhmaṇas,” *Adyar Library Bulletin* 29 (1965): 1–25; A. Benke, “Die Magie in der Brāhmaṇa-Zeit” (M.A. Thesis, University of Erlangen, 1976); Asko Parpola, “On the Symbol Concept of the Vedic Ritualists,” in *Religious Symbols and their Functions*, ed. H. Biezais (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1979), 139–53; Witzel, “On Magical Thought in the Veda” (1979) and “Macrocosm, Mesocosm, and Microcosm” (1998); Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); A. Wezler, “Zu den sogenannten Identifikationen in den Brāhmaṇas,” in *Festschrift Paul Thieme, Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 20 (1996): 485–522; Patrick Olivelle, intro. to his translation of the Upaniṣads (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), lii–lvi.

*Harmonia Mundi Sympathica, 10 Enneachordis totius naturae
Symphoniam exhibens.*

	Enneachordus I	Enneachordus II	Enneachordus III	Enneachordus IV	Enneachordus V	Enneachordus VI	Enneachordus VII	Enneachordus VIII	Enneachordus IX	Enneachordus X
	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Mundus Archetyp. DEVS	Mundus Siderius Coel. Emp.	Mundus Mineralis	Lapides	Plantae	Arbores	Aquaticae	Volucres	Quadrupedes	Colores varij
	Seraphim	Firmamentum	Salia, stellas Minerales.	Astrites	Herbæ & Flor. stell.	Frutices Bacciferæ	Filices stellares	Gallina Pharaonis	Pardus	Diversi Colores
	Cherubim	5 Nete	Plumbum	Topazius	Helleborus	Cyperus	Tyrannus	Bubo	Asinus, Vrius	Fuscus
	Troni	♂ Paramef.	Æs	Ametistinus	Betonica	Citrus	Acipenser	Aquila	Elephas	Rufus
	Dominationes	♂ Paramef.	Ferrum	Adamas	Abfynthid.	Quercus	Pfiphias	Falco Accipiter	Lupus	Flammeus
	Virtutes	♂ Mele	Aurum	Pyropus	Heliotropium	Lotus, Laurus	Delphinus	Gallus	Leo	Aureus
	Potestates	♂ Lichanos	Stannum	Beryllus	Satyrum	Myrtus	Truta	Cygnus Columba	Cervus	Viridis
	Principatus	♂ Parhypæ.	Argentum Vivum	Achates Iaspis	Pzonia	Malapunica	Castor	Pfistacus	Canis	Ceruleus
	Archangeli	♂ Hypæ	Argentum	Selenites Crystallus	Lunaria	Colutea	Ostrea	Anates Anfers	Alurus	Candidus
	Angeli	Ter. c. Ele. Proslamb.	Sulphur	Magnes	Gramina	Frutices	Anguilla	Struthio camelus	Insecta	Niger

Figure 1. A late-traditional European cosmological chart illustrating some typical cross-cultural features of high-correlative systems. The chart is composed of one hundred cells set out in ten columns and rows. The ten vertical columns represent ten orders of reality, beginning with the divine realm on the left and ending on the right with the "realm" of colors. Each row in each column represents a different hierarchical level in its order, ranging from the archetypal and perfect order at the top to the least perfect at the bottom. The whole is meant to illustrate the "sympathetic harmony" that magically unites the cosmos; movement horizontally through any row takes you through corresponding elements in different orders that are correlatively linked. Thus in the fifth row from the bottom we find cosmic correspondences between the order of angels known as "Powers," the sun, the metal gold, the "stone" iron pyrite (fool's gold), the sunflower, the lotus tree, dolphins among sea animals, cocks among flying creatures, lions among quadrupeds, and gold among colors. On the far left, each hierarchical division in the universe is related to a different musical scale in a quasi-Pythagorean manner. Similar mathematical and harmonic principles show up in non-Western cosmological charts, organized in temporal as well as hierarchical fashions. Charts like these were widely used for magical-medical purposes in Europe as well as for contemplative ends, as they were in China and elsewhere in the Old World. Similar schemas were manifested in verbal form in hundreds of scholastic traditions stretching from the last centuries BCE to early modern times in China, South East Asia, India, the Middle East, and the West. Primitive charts of the same general type can also be found in various literate Mesoamerican traditions. From R. Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia, in duo volumina secundum cosmi differentiam divisa* (Oppenheim, 1617–21).

Claims have been made that all of Vedic philosophy depended on what Sinologists would immediately recognize as "correlative thought"—although Indologists do not use that phrase—emerging in increasingly complex and abstract forms in successive strata of tightly linked Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads, and Sūtras in Vedic traditions; indeed, as Renou argued decades ago, the original meaning of *upaniṣad* was "connection" or "equivalence"—which we could just as correctly translate as "correlation"!—and "the aim of the whole of Vedic thought may be expressed as the

attempt to formulate *upaniṣads*.⁹ Nevertheless, study of the exegetical processes that generated *bandhus* or *upaniṣads* has attracted virtually no interest in the field, following the distaste expressed by nineteenth-century Indologists for the exegetical discussions in the Brāhmaṇas and related texts, in which India's earliest high-correlative systems were shaped. Dismissals of the "irrationalities" and "absurdities" of these discussions can be found in a long line of researchers stretching from F. Max Müller (epitomized in his famous "twaddle of idiots" remark) to Sylvain Lévi, Arthur Macdonell, Julius Eggeling, Arthur Berriedale Keith, and Frits Staal.¹⁰ Nowhere have the connections between these exegetical discussions and attempts to "formulate *upaniṣads*" been studied in detail. This is particularly unfortunate, since exegetical reworkings of stratified texts can be traced far more easily in Vedic traditions, whose textual strata have been recognized for over 150 years, than they can in either Chinese or Greek sources, in which the concept of textual layering itself is still often viewed as controversial.¹¹

In any case, abundant materials are available to study the emergence of high-correlative systems in Vedic sources—providing useful models for studies of similar processes in early Chinese and Greek traditions, for which we possess far fewer sources. By the middle of the first millennium BCE, at the latest, we find elaborate high-correlative systems emerging in Vedic traditions as exegetes struggled to harmonize heavily layered ritual texts passed on from earlier eras. To cite just one example: In later strata of the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, apparently dating from early in the second half of the millennium, we find elaborate lists of *bandhus* in which each Vedic god is systematically correlated with unique numbers, consorts, ritual meters, directions, seasons, hours of the day, priestly orders, oblations, sacrificial animals, and similar phenomena. The correlations found here and in other texts of the period are significantly more detailed than classic examples of early correlative thought in high-syncretic Chinese treatises like the *Lüshi chunqiu* (The Spring and Autumn of Mr. Lü), completed on the eve of China's unification in the latter part of the third century BCE.¹² Similar correlations are even more fully developed in Vedic Upaniṣads and Sūtras from the last half of the millennium, which exegetically "worked up" (as Karlgren put it for his Han dynasty "systematizers"¹³) earlier traditions in even more abstract directions. Correlative systems of still greater complexity, especially rich in numerological associations, are found in early Buddhist and Jainist texts compiled near the close of the millennium.

⁹ Louis Renou, *Religions of Ancient India* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 18; cf. Smith, *Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*, 31–32, and Olivelle, "Introduction," lii, n. 28).

¹⁰ Cf. Witzel, "On Magical Thought in the Veda"; for summaries of the views of some of these later writers, see Smith, *Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*, 32 ff.

¹¹ On this issue in Chinese traditions, see, e.g., the discussions in E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). Resistance to the idea of textual layering is even stronger in Greek studies, where challenges to the traditional authorship of heavily stratified works like the Aristotelian and Platonic corpora have been largely taboo since Werner Jaeger's day. For discussion, see Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 27–28, n. 72.

¹² [*Lüshi chunqiu*], *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, with trans. by John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹³ Bernhard Karlgren, "Legends and Cults in Ancient China," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 18 (1946): 199–365; "Some Sacrifices in Chou China," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 40 (1968): 1–32.

By the early common era, centuries of reworkings of these layered texts had given birth to high-scholastic systems of extraordinary elaboration. These developments are beautifully illustrated in the intricate logical-mystical constructs of the massive seventh book of the Buddhist *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, which far surpasses in complexity (and obscurity) any extant Chinese or Western scholastic treatise from the same era.¹⁴ Correlative systems of the same general type as those seen in post-classical Daoism in China, or in contemporary gnostic, Neo-Pythagorean, or Neo-Platonic traditions in the West, can be studied in later strata of the Mahābhārata and Purāṇas, in countless tantric and maṇḍala sources, and in late-ancient and medieval scholastic systems subdivided (just as elsewhere in the Old World) into a profusion of warring “schools.” Fresh developments in these systems continued to appear up through the Mughal period, exhibiting structural features similar to those seen in contemporary high-syncretic systems from the European Renaissance or Ming dynasty. These parallel developments can be simply explained by the fact that those systems arose from integrations of layered traditions whose temporal depth and complexities were of roughly the same magnitude in each previous stage of history, stretching from the mid first millennium BCE until early modern times.¹⁵

But, for reasons noted earlier, while *bandhus* and *upanīśads* in Indian traditions have been discussed continuously since the nineteenth century, the importance assigned to correlative thought by Indologists has never approached the levels found in Chinese studies, hampering the comparison of cosmological developments in the two civilizations.

Historical fashions have limited discussions of correlative systems even more drastically in Western thought. The fact that correlative systems were being elaborately developed in Greece by the fourth century BCE—the same period in which we find major developments in those systems in India and China—is evident from many sources. Even well-known texts like the Aristotelian *Metaphysics* (Book I, 986a23 ff.) provide unambiguous reports of abstract charts of correspondences remarkably similar to those known from slightly later in China. The Pythagoreans, the *Metaphysics* tells us, claim that

... there are ten principles, which they arrange in two columns of cognates—limited and unlimited, odd and even, one and plurality, right and left, male and female, resting and moving, straight and curved, light and darkness, good and bad, square and oblong.¹⁶

¹⁴ For a heroic attempt at translation, see U. Nārada Mūla Paṭṭhāna Sayadaw, assisted by Thein Nyun, trans., *Conditional Relations (Paṭṭhāna). The Chaṭṭhaṅgāyana Text of the Seventh Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (London: Pali Text Society, 1969, 1981), 2 vols. The extreme complexities of these early scholastic systems suggest that textual flows in the regions of South Asia in which they were compiled were anomalously high or, more likely, that they arose from intense inbreeding of sources in “closed” monastic conditions.

¹⁵ Some of these parallels are treated in Henderson, *Development and Decline*, chapt. 1, 40 ff., and Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, chapt. 2, 74–96. A fuller treatment of this issue is found in a working paper on which part of the present article is based: Steve Farmer, John B. Henderson, and Peter Robinson, “Commentary Traditions and the Evolution of Premodern Religious, Philosophical, and Cosmological Traditions: A Cross-Cultural Model” (1997, 2002). A PDF file of the paper can be downloaded from <http://www.safarmer.com/model.pdf>. Cf. also José Ignacio Cabezon, ed., *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Following here the standard Oxford translation. The *Metaphysics* ascribes these ideas to Alcmaeon of Croton, who lived in the fifth century BCE; however, extant fragments ascribed to Alcmaeon contain nothing remotely this abstract; hints in the same passage of the *Metaphysics* suggest that these charts were probably the work of fourth-century commentators “working up” far less abstract concepts in the Pythagorean subtradition associated with Alcmaeon’s name.

Broader correlative systems grew rapidly in the following centuries in Stoic and gnostic sources, Neo-Pythagorean and Neo-Platonic traditions, Hermetic and Orphic texts, and in a wide range of astrological-magical, medical, and mystical sources. These ancient correlative systems reached their heights of complexity in the high-scholastic traditions of post-Plotinian Neo-Platonism (identified with such figures as Iamblichus, Porphyry, Syrianus, and Proclus) and closely related Aristotelian commentaries (ascribed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and Simplicius, etc.), compiled from the second through sixth centuries CE. The exegetical origins of these systems are underlined by the fact that their most extreme developments can be traced to attempts to harmonize discordant strata in the Platonic or Aristotelian corpora. But once again, modern discussions of these systems have focused on other features than their exegetical origins or correlative properties, obscuring their connections to similar high-correlative systems emerging in exactly the same period in India and China.

It is only in late-medieval and Renaissance studies that we find extensive discussions of “systems of correspondences” in Western thought. But even here, the literature rarely associates these systems deeply with their ancient antecedents, let alone with non-Western traditions, which are rarely discussed (or even mentioned) by specialists in these fields. The whole apparatus of correlative thought was clearly implied in the so-called great chain of being, popularized by Lovejoy in lectures delivered one year before Granet’s work went to press.¹⁷ But Lovejoy heavily stressed the hierarchical and “rational” sides of Western cosmology over its correlative or “organic” components—skewing the data in opposite directions from Granet and reinforcing old romantic myths, backed by both writers for different ends, concerning deep East/West divides.¹⁸ Outside the exceptions already noted, so little has been made of correlative thought in the West that Needham, in one of his most sublime Sinophilic moments, could seriously claim that all but the most “primitive” forms of Western correlative thinking were a Chinese import, adopted wholesale in the “philosophy of organism” he associated with Leibniz’s monadology.¹⁹

¹⁷ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. The William James lectures delivered at Harvard University, 1933, by Arthur O. Lovejoy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

¹⁸ While Granet romanticized about a timeless Chinese “Sagesse” opposed to Western “Raison” (*La Pensée chinoise*: e.g., 27–28), Lovejoy ignored China entirely and dismissed the “illusionism” and extreme “other worldly” views he associated with Indian thought as “plainly the extremest kind of nonsense” (1936: 30). Granet’s stress on the unique development in China of correlative thought arose from Durkheimian views “run amok,” as Henderson (*Development and Decline*, 7) puts it—based on the view that Chinese ideas “dépend très strictement de l’évolution sociale” (1934: 26–7), and linked to the implied assumption that each civilization gives birth to its unique forms of thought. Surprisingly, while Granet (p. 29 note) credits his views to Durkheim and Mauss in *Primitive Classification*, a rereading of the sections of that work on China shows Granet’s teachers abandoning their accustomed social determinism to insist that systems of correspondences were independent of any form of social organization—pointing to examples in Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and elsewhere in Asia no less than in China. See chap. 4 in Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, “De quelques formes primitives de classification: contribution à l’étude des représentations collectives,” *Année Sociologique* 6 (1901–2), Paris, 1903: 1–72; trans. by Rodney Needham as *Primitive Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). It was hence Granet, and not Durkheim or Mauss, who was most responsible for the persistent myth that correlative thinking was a peculiarly Chinese phenomenon. On some further distortions of Chinese thought in Western scholarship, see Zhang Longxi, “The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West,” *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1) (Autumn, 1988): 108–31.

¹⁹ Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, Vol. 2, 292–303. On 2000 years of Western antecedents to Leibniz’s monadology, see *Syncretism in the West*, 85–89.

The result of these conflicting tendencies in Chinese, South Asian, and Western scholarship is that specialists have yet to exploit the powerful cross-cultural framework that studies of correlative systems can provide for premodern research. Correlative thought has been intensely discussed by Sinologists since Granet's day, but with little regard for its deepest foundations (leaving aside Graham's forays into old structuralist models), and none for the exegetical processes involved in its development. Correlative systems have been studied piecemeal in premodern India and the West, but without concern for their cross-cultural properties or their links to layering processes in textual traditions. Similar remarks can be added in respect to studies of early correlative systems in ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia, or in Mesoamerica, which (especially now that Maya sources are being deciphered) offer abundant materials for study of the evolution of correlative thought in literate New World civilizations.²⁰

In the rest of this paper we will briefly examine the neurobiological grounds of correlative thought and closely related animistic-religious ideas; we will then consider the ways in which high-correlative systems "worked up" those ideas in later textual traditions. One of the implications of the model introduced below is that it is useful in many ways to approach premodern thought as a unified field: It is critical for Sinologists to be familiar with Indological issues, Western specialists with Mesoamerican studies, and all premodernists with some basic neurobiological principles. As suggested below, a unified approach to these fields provides unexpected insights into the evolution of correlative systems—approached globally and not just in premodern China.

Neurobiological foundations of correlative systems

With the exception of A. C. Graham's studies from the 1980s, which attempted to link correlative thought to old structuralist theories (drawing on Saussure, Jakobson, and Levi-Strauss, etc.), discussions of correlative systems have usually ended at the purely descriptive level. Those systems have also typically been discussed statically, ignoring the fact that those systems evolved at vastly accelerated rates in specific periods—e.g., throughout much of the Old World in the last half of the first millennium BCE (in the so-called axial age) and in later high-scholastic eras. Both these limitations can be overcome when those systems are approached from neurobiological and historical perspectives.

Even a quick look at the neocortex (or simply cortex)—the thin outer brain layer responsible for all high-level perceptual, motor, emotional, and cognitive processing—underlines important links between brain architecture and correlative systems. The following sections review three principles of neurobiology relevant to this topic: (1) the existence throughout the neocortex of high degrees of structural symmetry, seen most dramatically in "topographic maps" (the technical term for

²⁰ A good starting point for cross-cultural research of this sort is found in Mesoamerican concepts of man-the-microcosm, which were just as important in New World medical traditions as they were in medical traditions in premodern China, India, and the West. See, e.g., Alfredo López Austin, *Cuerpo humano e ideología: las concepciones de los antiguos nahuas*, 3rd ed. (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1989–1990), 2 vols.

correlative brain structures);²¹ (2) hierarchical/abstractive processes involved in the perceptual and cognitive functions of those maps; and (3) social biases in the early formation of brain maps that can be tied to animistic-religious features of primitive correlative systems. After a brief review of these principles, we will examine some ways in which these primitive correlative systems were “worked up” abstractly in textual traditions.

Cortical symmetries and topographic (or correlative) ‘maps’

It will be useful before we start to review quickly how different cortical regions are related to brain functions. Most brain functions are known today to involve highly “distributed” processes arising from the interaction of many brain areas; the result is that those functions cannot be localized in the simple ways that were often taken for granted by laymen and researchers alike even a few decades ago. Nevertheless, insofar as damage to specific cortical areas results in fairly predictable perceptual, cognitive, or behavioral deficits, the traditional assignment of individual brain functions to specific cortical regions retains significant heuristic value. Thus localized damage to the occipital lobe, found in the extreme posterior of the cortex, typically results in major visual deficits; injuries to the regions known as Broca’s and Wernicke’s areas normally lead to profound language deficits (different in each of the two regions); damage to “higher” cognitive functions—including planning, judgment, novel category formation, model building, and social behavior—is most pronounced when damage occurs in the prefrontal cortex, in the extreme anterior of the brain; and so on.²²

For our limited purposes, the most crucial fact is that *despite* these functional differences, high levels of symmetry link every cortical region. In all but one special case (in primary visual cortex), for example, vertical cell counts are almost precisely the same in each area of the neocortex, regardless of its functions. Moreover, cells in all regions are “wired” in highly correlative fashions, generating what have been aptly characterized as “nearly crystalline arrays.” A few of these structural symmetries are quickly illustrated in **Figure 2**.

Pioneering work by Mountcastle on the auditory cortex and Hubel and Wiesel on the visual cortex first demonstrated in the late 1950s through 70s that symmetries of this sort are not accidental but are central to brain processing. Narrow bands of tightly wired neural assemblies, often referred to as “columns,” were shown by these researchers to serve highly specific computational tasks—beginning with primitive “feature” detection in the primary sensory regions located in posterior areas of the

²¹ Topographic mapping refers to the fact that spatial relations between tightly linked groups of neural cells (or “neural assemblies”)—the basic units of cortical processing—are typically preserved in synaptic projections to other brain regions; as noted below, correlative mapping of this sort is critical to perceptual integration and to the development of “higher” cortical functions. On topographic maps, see Patricia Churchland, *Neurophilosophy: Towards a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 119 ff., and Barry E. Stein and M. Alex Meredith, *The Merging of the Senses* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). For recent discussions of cortical maps from a computational perspective, see the papers collected in Klaus Obermayer and Terrence Sejnowski, eds., *Self-Organizing Map Formation: Foundations of Neural Computation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

²² For detailed discussions, see, e.g., Vernon B. Mountcastle, *Perceptual Neuroscience: The Cerebral Cortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Joaquín M. Fuster, *The Prefrontal Cortex: Anatomy, Physiology, and Neuropsychology of the Frontal Lobe*, Third Edition (Philadelphia: Lippincott-Raven, 1997).

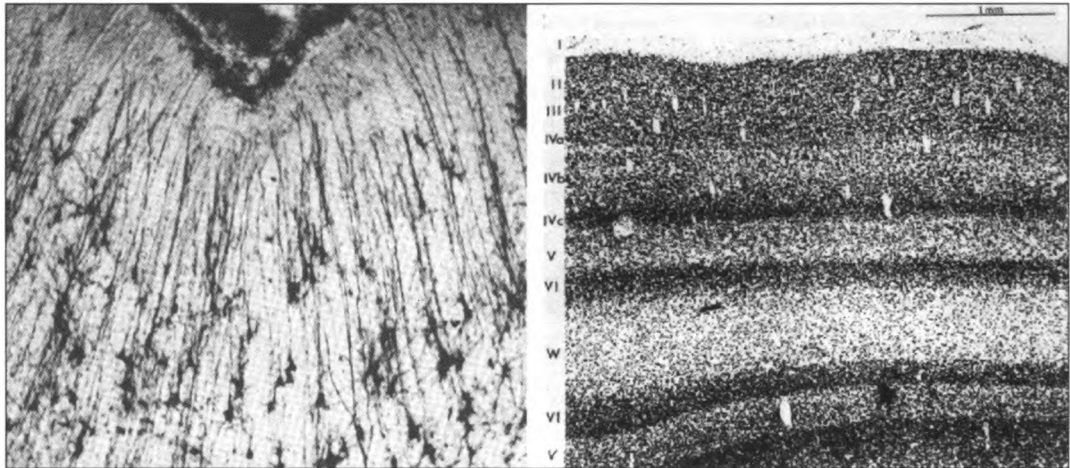


Figure 2. Illustrations of structural symmetries in the neocortex, which are highlighted differentially in vertical and horizontal directions when cortical tissue is treated with different staining methods. As we argue below, these symmetries are critical to the formation of topographic ‘maps’ and ultimately to the generation of premodern correlative systems. On the left: some vertical symmetries in the cortex, arising from stereotypical ‘wiring’ patterns in neural cells serving specific computational functions; adapted from Nauta and Feirtag (1986). On the right, horizontal layering in the striate (primary visual) cortex underscored by different staining methods; the numbers on the left mark cortical layers that are again associated with specific neural functions; adapted from a classic paper by Hubel and Wiesel (1977).

neocortex. Thus some neural columns are selectively “tuned” in the primary auditory cortex to specific tones, frequencies, or other variables; other columns in the visual cortex are “tuned” to specific orientations of lines in space, to different colors, or to other visual features; and so on for all other perceptual processing regions.

Extending these early findings, researchers in the past decade have focused on how cortical symmetries are involved in *reconstructing* reality when data from early feature detectors are reassembled in stages—first in monosensory and later in multi-sensory “maps” of the perceptual field.²³ Animal studies of neurons in both subcortical and cortical integration centers suggest that correlative overlays of a series of sensory maps are critical to the synthesis of perceptual data; the integrative functions of these maps are illustrated in Figure 3.

Both anatomical and experimental research have shown that maps that integrate data in every part of the cortex are wired in correlative fashions like these, joined by massive feedback and feedforward loops that link distant cortical and subcortical regions.²⁴ Recent studies suggest that simultaneous firings of neural assemblies joined in these multiple maps, coordinated by means of those looplike connections, are required to “bind” perceptual and cognitive experience into experiential wholes.

It is important to note that the principles of topographic organization extend all the way to the prefrontal cortex—suggesting that all higher categories of thought, and not just reconstructions of perceptual reality, are dependent on correlative processes. The fact that orderly mapping of data occurs in the prefrontal cortex was first suggested in a famous series of experiments by Patricia Goldman-Rakic

²³ For details, see Stein and Meredith, *Merging of the Senses*.

²⁴ For early discussion of this issue, see the now classic study by Gerald Edelman, *Neural Darwinism: The Theory of Neuronal Group Selection* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

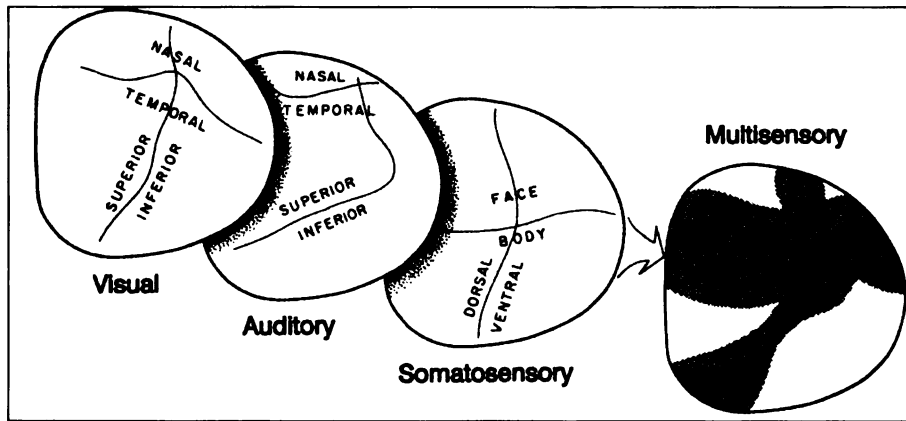


Figure 3. An abstract representation of the integration of topographic (or correlative) maps involving vision, hearing, and touch in multisensory neural integrators, in this case located in a subcortical region (the superior colliculus). Both animal and human studies suggest that the step-like integration of perceptual and cognitive maps generated in different cortical regions *requires* that data in those regions be organized in structurally correlative fashions; in the absence of such symmetries, as suggested by studies of brain-damaged patients, reality would be perceived in a fragmented fashion. Diagram adapted from Stein and Meredith (1993).

in the 1970s and 1980s. In one experiment, researchers in Goldman-Rakic's group injected a tracer chemical near the frontal pole of a monkey's brain, located near the extreme anterior of the prefrontal cortex. Autoradiographic images of a distant cortical region linked to that area displayed remarkably symmetries induced by the experiment—suggesting that neocortical projections map neatly in the brain even in regions far removed from any sensory input.²⁵ Still further studies suggest that topographic mapping even in the sensory cortex is critical to learning as well as to the performance of perceptual tasks.²⁶

Finally, it can be noted that studies of synesthesia—the bizarre pathological condition in which colors may be “heard,” or sounds “tasted,” etc.—provide further suggestions that correlative thinking has deep neurobiological roots. One model of synesthesia, in fact, pictures the condition as simply a heightened level of consciousness of multisensual integration taking place continuously in all subjects just below the conscious level. This model finds support in the fact that synesthesia can be readily induced in normal subjects through the use of hallucinogenic drugs—a standard means of producing heightened awareness of perceptual correspondences in premodern ritual traditions.²⁷

The fact that human emotions can be reliably manipulated through systematic

²⁵ For discussion, see Walle J.H. Nauta and Michael Feirtag, *Fundamental Neuroanatomy* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1986), 303, 307.

²⁶ See, e.g., M.E. Diamond, R.S. Petersen, and J.A. Harris, “Learning through Maps: Functional Significance of Topographic Organization in Primary Sensory Cortex,” *Journal of Neurobiology* 41(1) (October, 1999): 64–8.

²⁷ On synesthesia, see, e.g., T.J. Palmeri, R. Blake, et al., “The Perceptual Reality of Synesthetic Colors,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 99(6) (19 March 2002): 4127–31; Simon Baron-Cohen and John E. Harrison, eds., *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); R. E. Cytowic, *Synesthesia: A Union of the Senses* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1989). Also suggestive is A. R. Luria's classic study of synesthesia and memory processes, *The Mind of a Mnemonist* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

shifts in music, rhythms, color, light and darkness, and other sensual input provides further suggestions of this nature—as do studies of correlative processes linking language and hand movements or research into other non-verbal social communications.²⁸ The view that mild synesthesia may be involved in all aesthetic experience can be traced back at least to Goethe's studies of colors and emotions, and to later efforts by the French symbolists to develop "natural" theories of correspondences.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the specific contents of cortical maps are not "hard-wired" in the brain but are highly "plastic," changing exact response patterns as input from physical or cultural environments is varied.²⁹ Even the location of specific cortical processing regions may vary in different individuals, depending largely on cultural or environmental input. The result is that while neurobiology helps explain the origins of correlative systems, it cannot predict the exact contents or specific functions of those systems, which are subject to numerous historical variables. We will consider some of the forces that shape these contents when we discuss layering processes in premodern literate traditions.

Functional hierarchies in cortical processes ('maps of maps')

The second feature of cortical organization pertinent to our model is closely related to correlative mapping, and can accordingly be discussed quickly. Topographic maps not only link cortical regions existing on the same brain "level"—producing structurally congruent maps of visual and auditory fields, for example—but are organized as well in hierarchical stacks in which increasingly abstract "maps of maps" combine lower-level data in higher-level categories. Precise localization is again problematic due to the distributed nature of brain functions; but a significant body of animal and human studies suggests that generation of the most abstract "maps of maps," if not their local storage, is one of the principal functions of the prefrontal cortex.³⁰

Hierarchical stacking of maps is widely recognized as a general feature of the neocortex, linking mono- and multisensory maps in posterior areas of the brain with cognitive maps in more anterior regions. The result is a series of complexly nested systems in which "the frontal hierarchy is the mirror image of the posterior hierarchy," as Fuster puts it³¹—unconsciously adopting the most common premodern metaphor used to describe high-correlative systems.

The analogies between the organization of brain maps and the structure of correlative systems can also be inferred from an important series of experiments conducted by Merzenich and his colleagues in the 1980s, which first demonstrated

²⁸ For some reviews, see David McNeill, *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Peter Brown, *The Hypnotic Brain: Hypnotherapy and Social Communication* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

²⁹ For overviews of cortical plasticity, see the papers in Bela Juilesz and Ilona Kovács, eds., *Maturation Windows and Adult Cortical Plasticity*, Proceedings Volume XXIII, Sante Fe Institute (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

³⁰ For relevant studies and bibliography, see Fuster (1997), esp. ch. 8; Jordan Grafman, Kenneth J. Holyoak, and François Boller, eds., *Structure and Functions of the Human Prefrontal Cortex*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 769 (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1995), esp. Part V; Nina Robin and Keith J. Holyoak, "Relational Complexity and the Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex," in Michael S. Gazzaniga et al., eds., *The Cognitive Neurosciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 987–997.

³¹ Fuster, *Prefrontal Cortex*, 212.

that global changes in cortical maps follow similar transformations in lower neurological systems. This work has led to the construction of general brain models whose dynamic properties are remarkably similar to those found in premodern cosmologies, in which all “higher” and “lower” realms were typically thought to change in harmony. As Edelman remarks, summarizing Merzenich’s work, “changes on any one level must result in readjustment of all ‘linked’ levels”—language that could be adopted unchanged to describe the dynamics of virtually any traditional cosmological, astrological, or divinational system.³²

The role played by the prefrontal cortex in the hierarchical generation of the most abstract “maps of maps” is suggested by a large body of data: by the fact that the prefrontal cortex is more deeply connected than any other region to other cortical and subcortical areas; by evidence that it was the last region to develop in evolutionary terms; and by the fact that it is the final area to develop in children, coinciding with the first appearance of what are normally viewed as abstract reasoning abilities.³³ While most high-level concepts are undoubtedly acquired passively through linguistic transmission, as Vygotsky first emphasized in the 1920s, the *original* generation of those concepts necessarily derives from the syncretic integration of lower-level “maps” by the prefrontal cortex. It is important to note that these integrative processes are not limited to syntheses of perceptual information; indeed, much more rapid and reliable abstractive processes can be expected when those integrative processes operate on data “fixed” in textual traditions.

As we argue later, abstractive/syncretic processes of the latter type were critical to the accelerated development of abstract correlative systems that occurred in all advanced Old World societies in the second half of the first millennium BCE.—giving rise to cosmological frameworks that were increasingly “filled out” over the next two millennia as texts continued to accumulate and became the object of repeated exegetical integrations.

Topographic brain maps and animistic religious concepts

We can finally look at our third and in some ways most far-reaching principle, which links correlative brain processes to the origins of key animistic and religious properties of early correlative systems.

Since the mid 1960s, a number of prominent ethologists including Jolly, Humphrey, and Dunbar have argued that the vast evolutionary expansion that took place in the primate cortex, especially in the prefrontal region, arose in response to complex social needs and not to process socially “neutral” data. Social theories of intelligence,³⁴ as these views are sometimes called, may grossly underestimate the role of other co-evolutionary processes in the expansion of the neocortex, as their critics

³² *Neural Darwinism*, 173. For an overview of these experiments, see M. Merzenich, G.H. Recanzone, W.M. Jenkins, and R.J. Nudo, “How the Brain Functionally Rewires Itself,” in M.A. Arbib and J.A. Robinson, eds., *Natural and Artificial Parallel Computation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 170–210. For discussion of the historical implications these experiments, see Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 95–6, note 92.

³³ On some of these issues, beyond the studies mentioned in previous notes, see Terrence W. Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997). Some parts of prefrontal anatomy are not fully mature until well into adolescence.

have justly claimed. Nevertheless, it is impossible to question the heavy social biases in brain processing that originally led to the construction of these theories. Over a century and a half of studies of brain-injured patients demonstrate that the largest part of cortical space by far is devoted to social processing—to face recognition, verbal communications, decoding of social cues, regulation of sexual behavior, and similar functions—and not to “abstract” problem solving.³⁵ Much evidence indicates that the most complex social programs are regulated by the prefrontal cortex, highlighting again its role as the brain’s master model builder, responsible for generation of the most abstract “maps of maps.”³⁶ These functions are underlined by the fact that injuries to the prefrontal region, especially around the orbitofrontal area, frequently leave general intelligence intact but profoundly disrupt emotional and social behavior, destroying the individual’s ability to generate or act in accordance with socially appropriate models of the world.³⁷

Recent studies suggest that it is a basic principle of brain development that cortical maps in regions that mature early guide mapping developments in later maturing regions.³⁸ Given the deep social biases found in brain processing, it is hence not surprising to find general tendencies in children, no matter what their religious background, to overextend social categories to non-human phenomena when generating models of the world. Extending this finding to the historical realm, it can be argued that animistic religious views embodied in all early correlative systems are a natural outgrowth of the early social biases in brain processing, on the one hand, and normal mapping developments in the cortex, on the other.³⁹ The depth of early animistic or anthropomorphic biases in thought is suggested by the fact that remnants of those biases often show up even in supposedly “abstract” high-correlative systems—as illustrated, for example, by Aristotelian elements that *yearn* to reach their natural place, or by abstract concepts of force in China, India, and the West that clearly originated in primitive concepts of divine or cosmic “breath” (*qi*, *prana*, *pneuma*, *spiritus*, etc.).

³⁴ On social theories of intelligence, see, e.g., A. Jolly, “Lemur Social Behavior and Primate Intelligence,” *Science* 153 (1966): 501–6R; N.K. Humphrey, “The Social Function of Intellect,” in R. Byrne and A. Whiten, eds., *Machiavellian Intelligence: Social Expertise and the Evolution of Intellect in Monkeys, Apes, and Humans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 13–26; R.I.M. Dunbar, “Coevolution of Neocortical Size, Group Size and Language in Humans,” *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 16 (1993): 661–736; and Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

³⁵ On this issue, Dunbar (“Coevolution” and *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*) points to amusing studies that suggest that approximately 60% of all human conversations are spent gossiping about personal relationships and experiences—which is comparable to the percentage of time devoted to grooming among lower primates.

³⁶ Cf. Fuster, *Prefrontal Cortex*, 211–13; Deacon, *Symbolic Species*, 264 ff. and *passim*.

³⁷ On prefrontal regulation of social behavior, see, e.g., H. Damasio et al., “The Return of Phinias Gage: Clues About the Brain from the Skull of a Famous Patient,” *Science* 264 (1994): 1102–05; Bruce L. Miller and Jeffrey L. Cummings, eds., *The Human Frontal Lobes: Functions and Disorders* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), esp. chs. 31 and 32; Fuster, *Prefrontal Cortex*, 172 ff.

³⁸ This is most dramatically illustrated by learning disorders that arise after aberrant perceptual maps are established in sensory regions in early childhood. See the groundbreaking article by M.M. Merzenich and W.M. Jenkins, “Cortical Plasticity, Learning, and Learning Dysfunction,” in Bela Juilesz and Ilona Kovács, 247–72.

³⁹ On the extension of social categories to cognition in the earliest stages of infancy, see, besides the classic studies of Piaget and his school, the experimental studies cited in David Premack and James Premack, “Origins of Human Social Competency,” in Gazzaniga et al. (1995), 205–18. Interestingly, these data support the views of Durkheim and Mauss on the general dependence of early modeling of the world on socialization processes—though not the socially deterministic views often associated with their work. On these issues, see esp. chapt. 5 in *Primitive Classification*.

Further support for this idea shows up in hypersocial behavior patterns and exaggerated anthropomorphizing tendencies seen in children with Williams syndrome, a peculiar form of retardation that spares the prefrontal cortex, resulting in severe impairments in most cognitive domains *except* those involving social interactions. The condition can be viewed in a sense as the inverse of autism, which is marked by early failures in socialization and a deficiency in normal anthropomorphizing tendencies, followed frequently by catastrophic disruptions in later prefrontal developments.⁴⁰

Preliminary conclusions

A large body of evidence, only a small part of which we can discuss here, demonstrates that known neurobiological principles lay at the foundations of correlative tendencies found in all traditional civilizations—not just in premodern China. Even early tendencies to organize data in primitive dualistic categories (Brahman/Ātman, heaven/earth, yin/yang, limited/unlimited, being/becoming, etc.), which were heavily stressed in older structuralist models, can be persuasively linked to neurobiological processes, in this case opposing excitatory and inhibitory forces that underlie every neurological function—from the simplest synaptic operations to the highest levels of categorization and social modeling in the prefrontal cortex.⁴¹

Finally, combining data on social biases in cortical processing with what is known of correlative brain developments underscores the neurobiological origins of early animistic or anthropomorphic religious ideas and the closely related concept of “man the microcosm.” It is amusing to note that recent neurobiological discoveries can be cited to support the early critique of anthropomorphism ascribed to Xenophanes, who reputedly lived on the borders of the preliterate and literate worlds⁴²:

The Ethiopians have gods that are black and snub-nosed, the Thracians gods that are red-haired and grey-eyed.

If oxen and lions had hands or could draw and create works like those of men, and if animals were to draw pictures of gods, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen like oxen, and each would make their bodies similar in shape to their own.⁴³

Study of how correlative systems were modified in layered textual traditions, to which we now turn, is critical to understanding the ways in which “plastic” brain structures and cultural traditions have co-evolved over time. The fact that historical

⁴⁰ Primitive animistic and correlative-magical tendencies in normal children were first studied by Piaget in the 1920s. On Williams syndrome in general, see W. Jones, U. Bellugi, et al., “Hypersociability in Williams Syndrome,” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 12 (2000) Suppl 1: 30–46. An interesting discussion of the relationship between Williams syndrome and autism can be found in Deacon, *The Symbolic Species*, 268 ff.

⁴¹ The complementary roles of excitatory and inhibitory circuits in social behavior have been extensively studied in patients with prefrontal damage. For an important review, see Don M. Tucker, Phan Luu, and Karl H. Pribram, “Social and Emotional Self-Regulation,” in Grafman et al., 213–239.

⁴² Dying, according to the most common tradition, in 480 BCE, within four years of the traditional dates of the deaths of “Confucius” and the “historical Buddha.” Similar critiques of anthropomorphic tendencies arose in the same period in other regions of the Old World, for reasons suggested later.

⁴³ Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, frag. 16, 15, embedded in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII, iv, 22.1; V, xiv, 109.1–3.

data can be linked in *any* plausible way to brain development further suggests that cross-cultural studies of correlative systems are not simple antiquarian exercises: they may, in fact, provide a shortcut to future mergers of the neurobiological and cultural sciences that have been widely anticipated in the scientific literature since A.R. Luria's early work in the 1930s.⁴⁴

Layered texts and exegetical transformations of primitive correlative systems

Neurobiology highlights what might be termed the primitive default conditions in correlative thought. But it cannot on its own explain how or why high-correlative systems evolved in advanced premodern civilizations. Much of our research in the last two decades has been devoted to studying the textual components of this development, focusing on the interaction of neural and textual processes that generated different *types* of high-correlative systems in varying historical conditions. The final sections of our paper summarize a few of our general conclusions on this issue; readers are referred to our earlier studies for discussion of the role of exegetical processes in specific premodern traditions.⁴⁵

One of our conclusions can be summarized quickly: Many of the most distinctive features of high-correlative systems can be modeled as syncretic byproducts, or "exegetical artifacts," of repeated attempts to reconcile conflicts in heavily layered textual traditions. That conclusion holds for early anticipations of high-correlative systems in Egyptian and Mesopotamian traditions,⁴⁶ for the pan-Eurasian explosion of high-correlative thought in the last half of the first millennium BCE, and for the vast correlative cosmologies that emerged cross-culturally from late-ancient to early-modern times. Variations in the levels of abstractness, formality, and complexity in different high-correlative systems can be tied to the complexity of the traditions synthesized in those systems, to the degree to which later systems were built on the structural foundations of earlier ones, and to the influence of various dissipative forces in traditions that we note later.

One implication of our model is that it predicts the accelerated growth of correlative thought in every premodern period of textual expansion, when rates of information flows increased and pressures to harmonize traditions reached exaggerated levels. The "twaddle of idiots" that Max Müller derided in the *Brāhmaṇas* reflects, in a sense, early developments of this sort studied in midstream.

The following sections expand on a few of the points summarized above:

1. Premodern exegetical methods were in many ways culturally invariant.

These invariances are especially evident in the case of syncretic methods used "to

⁴⁴ On the latter issue, see, e.g., A.R. Luria, *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, trans. by Martin Lopez-Morillas and Lynn Solotaroff, edited by Michael Cole (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). Cf. the interesting discussions by one of the founders of modern "selectionist" neurobiology, Jean-Pierre Changeux, in *Neuronal Man: The Biology of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. chapt. 9.

⁴⁵ See the references in note 2.

⁴⁶ For discussion of some of these antecedents, see Barbara N. Porter, ed., *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World*, Vol. 1 of the Transactions of the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute (Washington: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2000). See especially in that volume Simo Parpola, "Monotheism in Ancient Assyria," 165–209; cf. also Walter Lambert's seminal work on the same topic, referenced below.

reconcile irreconcilable texts," to adopt Dodds's phrase.⁴⁷ We have identified several dozen methods of this type in our cross-cultural research; all can be linked to the same hierarchical-correlative processes that the brain uses to organize and synthesize *all* types of data—whether or not embodied in textual traditions. A few examples of these methods and their systematic effects are summarized in the chart found in the Appendix to this paper.

It is important to note that the same reconciliative technique could have different systematic effects when applied to different genres of texts or layers of traditions. When used to harmonize conflicts in early texts, for example, the same methods could generate monotheistic deities or abstract ethical or cosmological principles, depending on the exact types of texts or exegetical tasks to which those methods were applied. In later layers of traditions, byproducts of standard reconciliative techniques included paradoxical dualistic or trinitarian concepts of deity, formal systems of correspondences, multileveled images of heaven or hell, elaborate emanational systems, and a number of other familiar scholastic constructs. Over many centuries, a broad spectrum of exegetical byproducts was typically gathered up in increasingly formal multilayered systems—in Neo-Daoist, Neo-Platonic or Neo-Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, or Christian cosmologies, etc.—whose levels of correlative purity or "self-similarity," for reasons clarified later, tended to increase whenever traditions inbred or grew in complexity.

One of the most common syncretic methods harmonized textual conflicts by positing the simultaneous truth of conflicting ideas on different "levels" of reality—in the process generating new cortical "maps" reinterpreted as religious or metaphysical realities. The results of the repeated use of such methods, applied allegorically to poetic as well as to religious and philosophical texts, were the familiar bifurcations of reality universally associated with scholastic traditions. One variation of these methods reconciled conflicting references to gods, ethical principles, or other concepts by recasting them as inferior reflections of some "higher" and more abstract entity; use of this method can be linked to the earliest development of proto-monotheistic or monotheistic deities (whose syncretic origins have been discussed by Lambert and Parpola in respect to Assyrian religion, by Thompson and Taube in Mesoamerican traditions, and by us and others in Western sources⁴⁸), or, when applied to different types of exegetical problems, to the emergence of abstract cosmological principles (Heaven, the Way, Brahman/Ātman, the One, *Logos*, the idea of the Good, etc.). Despite the cultural differences dividing these concepts, the integrative processes that generated them were basically the same.

Similar reconciliative ends were often achieved by assigning conflicting ideas or

⁴⁷ Referring here to Proclus's use of the Neo-Platonic *henads* (abstract and repeatedly bifurcated orders of Greek deities) "to reconcile irreconcilable texts" containing conflicting references to the gods. See E.R. Dodds, *Proclus, The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (London: Clarendon Press, 1963), 267; cf. 259–260. For discussion, see *Syncretism in the West*, 86–89.

⁴⁸ For a brief discussion of some of these studies, see *Syncretism in the West*, 75–81. Cf. also Willfred G. Lambert, "Gott: Nach Akkadischen Texten," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, bd. 3 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1971), 543–46, and Lambert, "The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon: A Study in Sophisticated Polytheism," in Hans Goedicke and J.J.M. Roberts, eds., *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 191–200. Durkheim and Mauss also point in *Primitive Classification* (Eng. trans., 79) to anticipations of similar views in late-nineteenth century research, e.g. in the works of Hermann Usener.

traditions to different cyclical stages (or "phases") in cosmic history, or to emergent cosmological "types" in linear models of time; in both cases, the correlative structures of these two basic classes of temporal cosmologies (which were often syncretically fused) were normally tightened with each exegetical act.

While the full repertoire of exegetical methods was culturally invariant, some methods tended to be used more often in certain traditions than others; these differences help explain key regional differences in cosmological developments. Sometimes the selection of one method over another can be traced to underlying features of an evolving tradition; key variables included the levels of internal contradiction in the tradition, the types of texts found in its earliest layers, and the extent of its internal layering or "temporal depth." Exegeses of early sources mainly concerned with seasonal rituals, for example, naturally tended to favor the use of syncretic tools of a cyclical sort, while harmonizations of extended traditions of societies undergoing sustained social or environmental change just as naturally favored the use of the kinds of "typological" methods developed extensively in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions; repeated uses of these alternate exegetical tools can be linked to long-range regional differences in the emergence of cyclical or linear models of time. Attempts to harmonize other types of sources, including epic texts picturing the mirroring worlds of gods and men, just as naturally favored the development of hierarchical systems of atemporal sorts. Accidents of textual preservation, foreign influences, or random choices of reconciliative methods could complicate developments in any one case; but once a basic exegetical pattern was established in early levels of a tradition, inertial forces tended to reinforce its use in later layers in path dependent ways.⁴⁹

In approaching these developments, it is important to note that most exegetical discussions had little if any impact on systematic thought; still others exhibited strong anti-systematic tendencies.⁵⁰ The result is that systematic developments in premodern traditions were often painfully slow, masking the links between those developments and exegetical processes. Analogies here can be drawn to evolutionary biology, in which the slow accumulation of small mutations may lead almost imperceptibly to new life forms. Our model pictures similar mutations in traditions, frequently buried in obscure discussions in massive (or lost) commentaries, that slowly transformed religious, philosophical, and cosmological systems through many outwardly trivial exegetical acts. But in this case the general direction of change was convergent, not divergent. Over many centuries, the slow accumulation of those acts resulted in the emergence of high-correlative systems whose abstract correlative structures, if not their specific contents, tended to become increasingly similar over time.

The close associations between exegetical processes and the growth of those systems has also been masked by the prominent role played throughout premodern history by encyclopedias and epitomes, which tended to ignore formal exegetical discussions while summarizing (and hence further systematizing) their results; the result was a common decoupling of high-correlative systems from the exegetical

⁴⁹ In the computer simulations that we discuss later, "best-fit" rules can be used to match conditions in early textual traditions to the use of specific exegetical techniques; see the report referenced in note 61.

⁵⁰ On these tendencies, see Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy*; cf. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, ch. 4.

processes that helped generate them. Unlike the tedious exegetical discussions underlying the growth of those systems, summaries of this type tended to be laid out in intuitive and mnemonically attractive forms, mirroring the same hierarchical and correlative patterns used internally by the brain in processing information. The result is that bare summaries of the contents of these systems, and not discussion of the exegetical mechanisms that regulated their growth, have frequently passed for “analysis” of these systems even in modern times—reinforcing traditional views that those systems were unconditioned products of “speculative” thought.

It is only in extreme syncretic systems that the links between high-correlative thought and exegetical processes become impossible to ignore, making those systems ideal “laboratories” to study the evolutionary forces driving systematic developments.⁵¹ To carry our evolutionary metaphor one step further: periods of accelerated text flows that promoted the growth of extreme syncretic systems can be compared to biological eras of so-called punctuated equilibrium, in which evolutionary forces accelerate and the principles are clarified that give rise in all periods to new forms of life.

2. Developments in high-correlative traditions were closely coupled to rates of information flows and innovations in literate technologies.

High-correlative systems did not grow steadily, but tended to rise and fall in response to shifts in information flows, which were drastically affected by political and religious forces, innovations in information technologies, and major demographic changes. Of these forces, shifts in literate technologies (the development or spread of writing, light-weight writing materials, high-fidelity mnemonics, simplified scripts, shifts from scrolls to codices, the invention of paper or printing, etc.) were among the most powerful.

Consider as one example the conditions that existed in the fourth century BCE, which witnessed the accelerated growth of high-correlative systems in much of the civilized world. At a minimum, evidence suggests that literate revolutions were occurring throughout this century at the extreme ends of the Old World, as witnessed by the profusion of new traditions emerging in this period in the Middle East, Greece, and China. As we have argued elsewhere, evidence suggests that these developments depended less on increases in literacy rates, as Goody and others have argued, than on the vastly expanded use after the mid first millennium BCE of light-weight writing materials, the *sine qua non* of the development of layered manuscript traditions.⁵²

The case for this development in South Asia is far less certain, due in part to still unresolved issues concerning the dates of early Vedic sources and closely related Old Avestan traditions in Iran. Adding to these difficulties, since the late 1980s a series of influential studies by Fussman, von Hinüber, Falk, and others has argued that no use of writing for religious, philosophical, or literary purposes (and possibly no writing at all) existed in India until shortly before, and possibly not until, Asoka's

⁵¹ Cf. *Syncretism in the West*, xiv.

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*, 78–79 and n. 52, and Farmer, Henderson, and Robinson, “Commentary Traditions.” We have since slightly revised our views, in ways noted below, on the interaction in this era between literate and oral traditions in South Asia.

rock inscriptions appeared in the mid third century.⁵³ In judging these arguments, it is critical to note that South Asian texts whose core layers are commonly (if not universally) assigned to the fourth century BCE, including heavily layered texts traditionally ascribed to Pāṇini, Yāska, and various Vedic “school” founders, not only contain a few potential allusions to writing (the meaning of each of which is heatedly contested), but—far less ambiguously—numerous references to or quotations from earlier or contemporary sources.⁵⁴ While isolated cross-references of this sort exist in earlier Vedic sources, massive use of quotations and cross-referencing is unknown before this period, suggesting that India was undergoing a textual revolution of *some* sort in the fourth century BCE no less extreme than those occurring in China, Greece, or the Middle East; indeed, the number of extant Indian texts typically dated to this century far exceeds those surviving from any other Old World civilization. For the purposes of this paper, it is largely a matter of indifference whether the “texts” originating in this period were written or (as most Indologists currently believe) “fixed” exclusively through oral means—using high-fidelity mnemonics radically different from those studied by Goody, Ong, and other Western scholars in the tradition of Parry and Lord, who exclusively considered lower-fidelity mnemonics typical of epic traditions.⁵⁵

What were the attitudes in this era of priests, scribes, commentators, and/or reciters in the Middle East, Greece, India, and China to the rapidly expanding corpus of texts suddenly available to them? By the end of the fourth century BCE, most

⁵³ The most thorough discussion of the evidence is found in Harry Falk, *Schrift im alten Indien: Ein Forschungsbericht mit Anmerkungen* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1993). For a brief overview in English, see Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. 7–14. These new views of South Asian literacy must be taken seriously, but they also have important academic critics; all discussions of this issue take as their starting point the previous consensus that literacy came to India much earlier in the first millennium BCE, following the classic study by Georg Bühler, *On the Origin of the Indian Brāhma Alphabet*. *Indian Studies* 3. 2nd rev. ed. (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1898).

⁵⁴ On the latter point, see, e.g., Makoto Fushimi, “Brāhmaṇa Passages in Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra,” *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 4(1) (August, 1998). Quantitative measures of cross-referencing of this sort have not been exploited yet for their potential in estimating rates of textual flows or in helping date early sources in South Asia; we hope to discuss this issue elsewhere.

⁵⁵ For a quick overview of Indian mnemonics, see Arthur A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1900), 41 ff.; cf. Frits Staal, *The Fidelity of Oral Tradition and the Origins of Science* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1986). We can only touch briefly here on the heated debates over the roles of writing and orality in early Indian traditions. It is our current working thesis that writing had at least an indirect impact on Vedic traditions in the century or so following the Persian conquests in Gandhāra (N.W. India) in the last half of the sixth century BCE, reflecting the introduction in the region of written Aramaic by Persian officials. Significantly, Gandhāra was the area in which Pāṇinian grammar began to evolve sometime around this era and in which Yāska reportedly lived; N.W. dialects also figured prominently in the texts of the canonized Vedas traditionally said to have been “fixed” orally around this time on the extreme *opposite* (N.E.) side of the Indian subcontinent. In a forthcoming article on the “Gandhāran thesis,” we plan to discuss preliminary evidence that the evolution of the extreme Indian mnemonics used to canonize the Vedas developed in the N.W. as a “counter literacy” of sorts, grounded in older and less extreme mnemonic techniques, introduced by Brahmins to protect their ritual traditions from the threats of literacy emanating from the Persian conquests. Suggestive evidence exists that this development was followed by migrations of Vedic scholars to newly forming Indian states in the N.E., where the Vedas found their final canonized form. If the *prima facie* evidence we have collected on this thesis can be confirmed, puzzling near simultaneities in the canonization of traditions stretching from the Middle East through India from the sixth through fourth centuries BCE (and, indeed, eventually involving China) may have a remarkably simple explanation—linked directly or indirectly to literate forces spread by the vast Persian empire. The fullest treatment to date of the exceedingly complex issues involved in the formation of Vedic traditions is found in Witzel, “The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools.”

major Old World traditions were already heavily stratified, embodied in texts that had grown in layered ways over extended periods, or that added to existing strata rapidly through syncretic fusions with other traditions. That the lines between traditions were unusually fluid in this era can be illustrated by much evidence, including recent Chinese tomb finds of complex mixes of texts that cannot be identified easily with what were later recognized as single traditions.⁵⁶

One consequence of layering processes was that the texts available in this period were increasingly loaded with contradictions; ironically, authorship of those texts was typically ascribed to ancient seers, sage-kings, "school" founders, mythic heroes, prophets, or divine forces, implying exactly the reverse—that those texts could *not* be contradictory; that every apparent conflict hid secret truths. That assumption led to the application of a broad spectrum of exegetical tools to unveil those truths, resulting in predictable correlative transformations of earlier sources. By the end of the fourth century BCE, developments of this sort were already well on course in the Middle East, Greece, India, and China; repeated use of similar exegetical methods in all these regions resulted in accelerated abstract developments in otherwise unrelated religious, philosophical, and cosmological traditions—efficiently explaining many so-called axial age effects.⁵⁷

Opposing traditions also emerged in this period that violently attacked or tried to co-opt their competitors, resulting in wholesale forgeries, interpolations, and emendations that added further to the textual confusion. These problems were accompanied by growing uncertainties concerning the sense of key terms in earlier textual layers, especially terms originating in genuinely ancient times or foreign languages or dialects. Attempts to resolve these problems can be linked to the sudden emergence in this period throughout the Old World of formal etymological, grammatical, and logical traditions, all of them directly or indirectly linked to exegetical concerns.⁵⁸

Evidence from the fourth century BCE reveals not one but a broad range of exegetical attitudes, all of which would reappear in some guise in later periods of textual growth: exegetes heatedly defending or attacking the integrity of single traditions or "schools"; high-level syncretists (and casual eclectics) fusing traditions with abandon; and, at the opposite extreme, anti-text radicals, reacting to the "clamour of the schools," some of whom eventually turned their skepticism on human knowledge in general. Incipient anti-text movements in Greece, India, and China (ironically, most of which quickly generated their own written canons) found support in exegetical strategies of paradoxical types that helped generate "higher" mystical realms, inex-

⁵⁶ Cf. the comments in Sarah Allen and Crispin Williams, eds., *The Guodian Laozi: Proceedings of the International Conference, Dartmouth College, May 1998* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 2000), 179 ff. and *passim*.

⁵⁷ For traditional views of these effects, marked by much mystical obfuscation, see Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (München: R. Piper, 1949), and the papers collected in S.N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986).

⁵⁸ Seen, e.g., in the linguistic and logical developments in the Platonic *Cratylus* and Aristotelian *Organon*, in the traditions associated with Yāska and Pāṇini in India, and in so-called Mohist traditions in China. For a summary of some of these developments outside China, see, e.g., Wout van Bakkum, Jan Houben, Ineke Sluiter, and Kees Versteegh, *The Emergence of Semantics in Four Linguistic Traditions: Hebrew, Sanskrit, Greek, Arabic* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997). On related developments in China, see, e.g., A.C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1978).

pressible in words, that became increasingly prominent in the Middle East, Greece, India, and China in the last third of the millennium.

Elsewhere, we have looked at later eras of accelerated growth in correlative systems, tied to a variety of forces that affected text flows. These eras included the great period of Old World empires in the early common era, which witnessed the emergence of the first high-scholastic/syncretic systems; medieval periods transformed by major cross-cultural exchanges and (in East Asia) by the first printing revolution, which helped generate a wide range of secondary and tertiary scholastic systems; and the great age of syncretism in the Old World (and, indeed, the New One) starting in the late fifteenth century CE, which in a sense summed up the results of two thousand years of earlier traditions. Study of exceptional periods like these, as we argued earlier, is critical to understanding the links between rates of textual flows and the growth of high-correlative systems.

Fluctuations in these rates can also be tied to periods of *decline* in high-correlative systems, the most obvious coinciding with the collapse of the Han, Gupta, and Western Roman empires in late antiquity. Dampened rates of growth in those systems can be similarly identified in literate societies that possessed light-weight writing materials—and hence manuscript traditions of some sort—when conditions of sharply restricted literacy existed or strong institutional controls over information flows. Key examples show up in ancient Egypt before the Persian period, in the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires (in which scribes wrote on parchment as well as clay), in pre-Warring States China, and in the literate societies of Mesoamerica. The emergence of correlative systems can be traced in all these societies, in some cases (not all) in some detail; but key concepts in those systems never approached the levels of abstraction reached during the Old World textual revolutions of the last half of the first millennium BCE.

From a theoretical standpoint, even more revealing cases can be identified in which attacks on high-correlative systems followed sharp *increases*, and not decreases, in rates of textual flows—suggesting that the links between those rates and correlative growths were nonlinear. Striking examples appear in the early anti-text movements of the fourth century BCE, which we have already noted, and in a long line of textual “purist” movements and religious reformations that reappeared regularly in mature literate civilizations. These movements tended to rise and fall in harmony with the emergence of extreme syncretic tendencies, providing systematic “brakes” of sorts on correlative thought and, at least in some cases, peeling away later layers of stratified traditions. Advanced philological movements of this type were among the forces that contributed to the final collapse of high-correlative systems in China no less than in the West.⁵⁹ As we argue below, developments of this sort can be simulated in nonlinear computer models widely used to study the evolution of similar complex systems in other fields.

⁵⁹ *Development and Decline*, chaps. 6–9; *Syncretism in the West*, chap. 4.

3. Major parallel developments in premodern traditions can be explained without recourse to direct transmissions.

It is obviously *not* our claim that no long-distance transmissions existed in premodern history; any such claim could be quickly falsified by pointing to large-scale diffusions of Buddhist ideas that began no later than the early common era. However, radical differences in the intellectual contexts in which so-called abstract thought first emerged provide good reasons for *not* invoking processes of transmission to explain this or similar broad intellectual developments. Surely it is far-fetched to imagine that the sudden appearance of abstract cosmological principles (Heaven, the Way, Brahman/Ātman, the One, *Logos*, the idea of the Good, etc.) in the last half of the first millennium BCE can be explained by transmission of the bare *concept* of “abstract thought” throughout the Old World. This is especially true since near simultaneities in the appearance of these and related ideas—“golden mean” and “middle way” theories, abstract concepts of elements or “phases,” formal logical paradoxes, abstract numerological schemes, heightened mystical tendencies, and so on—can be quickly explained as exegetical byproducts *without* invoking such transmissions. All that was necessary to ensure the parallel development of ideas like these was sufficient cultural contact (through trade, travel, or demographic exchanges) to keep levels of sophistication in literate technologies in the Old World more or less in sync.

A short list of later developments that can be quickly explained in similar ways is provided in **Figure 4**. Many of the “exegetical artifacts” noted here can be identified not only in textual traditions, but as well in architectural and artistic structures whose derivation from ideas originating in literate traditions is often obvious.⁶⁰ Similar artifacts can also be found in the literate and architectural remains of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Examples of the exegetical methods that helped generate these concepts are again provided in the **Appendix** to this paper.

Figure 4 Common 'exegetical artifacts' that emerged in Old World traditions from classical through early modern times	
Increasingly paradoxical and transcendent concepts of deities The transformation of real or mythic tradition founders into cosmic beings Trinitarian concepts in Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism Concepts of avatars, multiple Buddhas, etc. Layered views of time (distinctions between time, eternity, aeviternity, etc.) Elaborate cyclical cosmologies with 'self-similar' or fractal structures (cycles within cycles, 'phases,' kalpas, etc.) 'Types' in linear models of time (e.g., in Judeo-Christian and Islamic thought) Intensified mystical-magical systems Formalized astrological systems Abstract hierarchies of angels, souls, bodhisattvas, demons, aeons, faculties, virtues, vices, etc.	Increasingly complex 'mirroring' visions of heaven and hell Elaborate formal charts of correspondences, mandalas, etc. 'Double truth' concepts in Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Neo-Confucian, and Christian scholasticism Nested hierarchies in scholastic systems Abstract emanational systems with a single or periodic reabsorption into the One Progressively complex numerological-cosmic systems (seen in Buddhist scholastics, Shao Yong, Joachim of Fiore, etc.) Increasingly formal correlative structures of canons and texts Extreme correlative (or fractal) cosmologies in which everything reflects everything else ('Indra's net,' Dante's multileveled picture of the cosmos, etc.)

⁶⁰ Recalling here Victor Hugo's description of Gothic cathedrals as “encyclopedias in stone,” and the close relationship between Buddhist texts and the correlative structures of great stupas like the one at Borobudur.

4. Patterns in the rise and fall of correlative systems are similar to those seen in other complex systems, suggesting that these patterns can be simulated in computer models.⁶¹

The claim that computer models can simulate much if anything pertinent to the evolution of religious or philosophical ideas breaks radically with traditional views of the history of thought—just as similar claims about neurobiology broke with accepted biological assumptions little more than two decades ago.⁶² Today, of course, computer models not only of neural processes but of many other biological systems at least as complex as the cultural systems discussed in this paper are all part of mainstream science.⁶³ Given the close links that we have shown exist between neurobiological and correlative systems, the claim that similar models have value in studying the evolution of those systems is hardly surprising.

Suggestions that the creation of such models is feasible show up in the fractal structures of extreme correlative systems, which not only organized cosmological data in correlative arrays, but sometimes represented the entire cosmos as a complex system in which everything reflected everything else. Perhaps the best-known example of this shows up in “Indra’s net,” a cosmological metaphor that reached its fullest expression in Huayan Buddhism in the second half of the first millennium CE. In this metaphor, the universe is pictured as a net whose nodes are fixed with jewels that mirror each other in endlessly recursive patterns, like reflections in an infinite hall of mirrors; similar metaphors based on mirroring themes were also pervasive in late-ancient and medieval cosmologies in the West. Even broader representations of multileveled reflecting worlds show up in the extreme scholastic-syncretic systems that evolved throughout the Old World in late-traditional times; the correlative structures of these systems were often so perfectly developed that they can be labeled “fractal cosmologies” without a hint of exaggeration; see Figure 5.

Broad families of algorithms that can generate fractal structures like these have been developed in the past two decades in disciplines concerned with the evolution of complex systems—including physics, astronomy, evolutionary biology, neurobiology, cardiology, geology, economics, mathematics, anthropology, and many other fields. One popular group of algorithms belongs to a class of models known as non-linear dissipative systems, which in one particularly simple and elegant form generates complex correlative structures from the interaction of two simple forces—one that pumps information or energy of some sort repeatedly into an evolving complex system and another that leaks part of that information or energy out of it. When the rates of these forces are appropriately “tuned,” the system develops self-similar or fractal structures in layered fashions remarkably similar to the ways in which those

⁶¹ A more technical treatment of the computer models discussed below is found in a technical adjunct to this paper written with our colleague Peter Robinson of NASA-Ames Research Center: Steve Farmer, John Henderson, Michael Witzel, and Peter Robinson, “Computer Models of the Evolution of Premodern Religious and Philosophical Systems.” The paper can be downloaded as a PDF file from <http://www.safarmer.com/simulations.pdf>.

⁶² It is useful to recall that nearly all modern computer models of brain systems trace their origins to mathematical proofs in a five-page paper published just twenty years ago: J.J. Hopfield, “Neural Networks and Physical Systems with Emergent Collective Computational Abilities,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 79 (1982): 2554–58.

⁶³ For a recent summary of developments in the field, see Marie E. Csete and John C. Doyle, “Reverse Engineering of Biological Complexity,” *Science* 295 (1 March 2002): 1664–69.

QUANT A CE QUE CHACUN DES TROIS

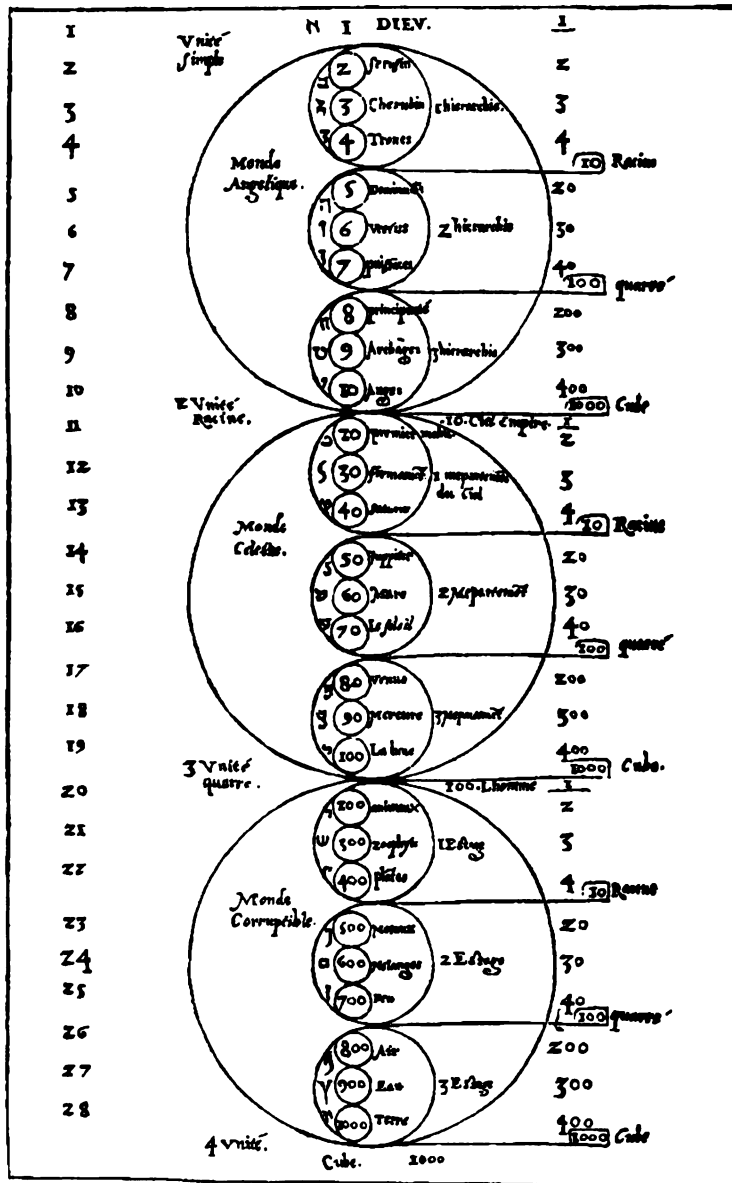
mondes est pouruen de sa racine, quarré & Cube, tout ainsi que l'Univers, comme il apparoit par les nombres qui sont hors les rondeaux, par là peux-tu entendre l'Armonie & conuenance de tout, & comme peut estre vray le dire d'Anaxagore, qui mettoit omnia in omnibus & singula in singulis.

Figure 5. An abstract diagram meant to illustrate the perfectly correlative structure of the universe, 'worked up' by a 16th-century French commentator from verbal hints in the works of one of the most extreme syncretists in history, the Italian philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94). The perfectly fractal structure of Pico's cosmology is evident in the scaled circles-within-circles and numerological proportions representing different ontological 'levels' in the universe. Pico's commentator sums up the fractal principles of reality with words often (if anachronistically) ascribed to the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras: *Omnia in omnibus & singula in singulis* ('All things exist in all things, and all individuals in all individuals'). The saying, which finds many counterparts in extreme syncretic systems in China, India, and the Middle East, could pass for a credible modern description of a self-similar or fractal system. Reprinted from *Syncretism in the West*, 195.

By permission of the British Library, 692.f.17, e6v.

Cette suite de nombres procedant de 1. a. 28. second nombre parfait & Cube du 3. declare le secret & mystere de l'ame & du monde descript & decouvert par Platon au Timée.

Note la mystere des lettres Hebraïques, chascune desquelles nous assigne que le nombre qui elle a pres de soy entes dans un petit rond.



structures emerged historically in high-correlative systems.⁶⁴

While other mathematical methods can be used to simulate fractal growths of this type,⁶⁵ nonlinear dissipative models are particularly well suited for the task due to the obvious similarities between their dynamic properties and the exegetical

⁶⁴ For details, see "Computer Models," referenced in note 61.

⁶⁵ E.g., cellular automata of the sort exhaustively discussed in Stephen Wolfram, *A New Kind of Science* (Champaign: Wolfram Media, 2002).

mechanisms found in layered textual traditions. As suggested in this paper, levels of self-similarity in premodern traditions tended to increase in predictable fashions as scribes, exegetes, scholiasts, and mnemonist-reciters of different eras “worked up” layered texts in extended attempts to harmonize them. Repetitive transformations like this can be usefully compared to the information or energy “pumps” in nonlinear dissipative models; dissipative forces or systematic “leaks” required in those models to ensure that levels of self-similarity increase as those systems evolve are fulfilled in historical traditions by textual losses, linguistic drift, or scribal or recitative errors, which played critical (if rarely discussed) roles in the structural evolution of premodern religious and philosophical systems. The joint operation of these two forces can be exploited in nonlinear dissipative models to simulate the growth of a broad range of cosmological structures—abstract systems of correspondences, complexly nested hierarchies, and in extreme cases hyperscholastic systems in which everything in the cosmos ends up reflecting everything else. Adjusting rates of information flows in these simulations provides ways to model the dampened growth or decline of correlative systems found in special historical situations—including the exceptional nonlinear conditions that led to the final collapse of those systems in the early scientific era.⁶⁶

Even “toy” simulations based on these ideas have important heuristic uses—clarifying the relationship between neurobiological processes, exegetical transformations in layered traditions, and related factors pertinent to the evolution of premodern religious and philosophical ideas. Those simulations can also help demonstrate the power of cross-cultural models of the history of thought, which should find increasing uses both in and out of the classroom as processes of cultural globalization move apace. Simulations of the same type can also be used to strengthen existing philological methods, most importantly by adding new strategies to traditional stylometric tools used to help date early texts.⁶⁷

But perhaps the most important use of such simulations lies in the illustrations they can provide of the contingent nature of many of the leading ideas that divide major world civilizations. One central principle of complex systems that can be dramatically illustrated in such simulations is the concept of the “sensitive dependence on initial conditions,” or the so-called butterfly effect.⁶⁸ In the historical case at hand, even small variations in ideas in early levels of layered traditions—arising from initial (and sometimes random) selections of canonical texts, key exegetical tasks, or syncretic methods—tend to be amplified over time by the same repetitive exegetical and dissipative forces that lead to long-range correlative growths in those traditions. The result is a rapid stabilization or historical “lock-in” of ideas, ending in long-term path dependencies in traditions of the sort noted earlier in this paper.⁶⁹ The ability of computer simulations to illustrate the ways in which even trivial differences in early

⁶⁶ Given their origins in neurobiological processes, correlative tendencies obviously show up in different ways in modern traditions; we plan to discuss this issue elsewhere.

⁶⁷ See further the discussion in “Computer Models.”

⁶⁸ So named after a famous 1972 lecture by Edward Lorenz: “Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set off a Tornado in Texas?” The text of the paper was first printed in Lorenz, *The Essence of Chaos* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993).

⁶⁹ For technical references, see note 7.

textual traditions can have massive effects in civilizations over thousands of years is one of the most sobering, and potentially most liberating, conclusions that can be expected from the application of scientific models to the history of thought.

Some conclusions specific to Sinology, and tests to confirm or falsify the model

Our analysis at the start of this paper of the old idea that correlative thought was more deeply entrenched in China than in other early civilizations suggests that historical research is not immune to its own path dependencies—originating in this case in nothing more profound than differing personal attitudes towards premodern traditions expressed by early researchers including Max Müller, A.O. Lovejoy, and Marcel Granet. Recognition of the neurobiological grounds of correlative systems, coupled with cross-cultural studies of how layering processes affected those systems' later growth, can help combat persistent myths concerning "great divides" supposedly separating major world civilizations.

Important ongoing work in Sinology, much of it associated with the Warring States Project at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst,⁷⁰ has helped refocus attention on processes of textual layering in the formative stages of Chinese thought. Hopefully expanded studies of this type will help revive similar interests among Western classicists, who largely abandoned studies of this sort early in the twentieth century, and encourage new research in this direction by Mesoamericanists, who are just starting to confront the heavily layered textual traditions of literate New World societies.

While research on stratified texts has been underway for 150 years, especially in biblical and Vedic studies, philologists have rarely studied the obvious connections between textual layering and long-range developments in the history of thought. Much more attention, as epitomized by classic papers published in this journal by Bernhard Karlgren,⁷¹ and by recent work in the Warring States Project, has focused on the traditional goal of unraveling stratified texts to attempt to reconstruct the original historical conditions underlying individual layers. While important conclusions can arise from such studies,⁷² insights of a different sort, as argued in this paper, can be gained by *reversing* this traditional approach—focusing on the ways in which exegetical transformations of layered texts affected both short- and long-range evolutionary developments in the cross-cultural history of ideas.

While numerous sources exist for studies of exegetical transformations in later periods of premodern history, and sometimes in very early ones (e.g., in heavily layered funereal texts in Egypt), Sinology is especially important to these studies due to recent discoveries of Chinese tomb texts from the critical period of early canon formation in the last third of the first millennium BCE. Comparison of the "received texts" of works like the Laozi with pre-canonized versions of those works found

⁷⁰ See the Project's homepage at <http://www.umass.edu/wsp>. For illustrations of the theoretical approach underlying the project, see Brooks and Brooks, *The Original Analects*. An early version of the present paper was presented at a Warring States Workshop Conference (WSWG 15) held in October, 2000.

⁷¹ See the references in note 13.

⁷² One of us (Witzel) has applied these methods to reconstruct social and political developments in South Asia in the Vedic era, which are even less well understood than those in similar periods in China. For discussion and detailed bibliography, see Witzel, "The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools."

at Guodian and Mawangdui can potentially throw new light on other premodern fields, including Vedic and Greek studies, in which many examples survive of heavily redacted texts originating in this period, but little if any hope exists of finding uncontaminated textual sources of the type “worked up” in those redactions.

The model discussed in this paper provides suggestions as to what kinds of evolutionary trends we can expect from detailed studies of these early sources, more of which can be expected to surface from Chinese archaeological finds in the next few decades. Such comparisons can also yield tests of various evolutionary views presented in this paper—with results that could lead us to expand, modify, or abandon parts of our model.

Tests of other sorts exist of that model, from which many predictions can be derived concerning what kinds of ideas should, or should not, be expected in the earliest layers of textual traditions. We conclude by discussing three major empirical tests of this nature; discussion of these tests will also allow us to answer in anticipation some objections to our views:

1. The model could be falsified by the discovery of formal systems of correspondences that developed in the *absence* of ‘fixed’ textual traditions.

In the heyday of structural anthropology, a long series of researchers, including most prominently Lévi-Strauss and Griaule, *did* claim that elaborate correlative systems of this sort, including formal systems of correspondences, were generated by preliterate peoples in the absence of “fixed” textual traditions.⁷³ These views heavily influenced A. C. Graham’s studies in the 1980s of correlative systems in China, which (like the work of most Sinologists before him) largely ignored the question of historical development in those systems.

We agree with Goody and Barth⁷⁴ that the abstract systems of correspondences discussed by Lévi-Strauss, Griaule, and other structuralists were largely artifacts of their own literate methodologies—or, in certain cases, reflections in more primitive societies of direct or indirect contacts with literate civilizations. We nevertheless concede that genuine confirmation of what we have referred to in this paper as “high-correlative” systems in the *absence* of “fixed” texts and layering processes—regardless of whether those texts involved writing or (keeping South Asian traditions in mind) high-fidelity mnemonics⁷⁵—would seriously challenge, and potentially falsify, parts of our model. On the other hand, the model cannot be overturned by pointing to the fluid correlative systems that Barth and others have extensively studied in preliterate ritual traditions, which are fully consistent with our claims concerning the neurobiological grounds of correlative systems.

⁷³ See, e.g., Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963); Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemméli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁷⁴ Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Barth, *Cosmologies in the Making* (1987) (see note 5).

⁷⁵ See the discussion above and in note 55.

2. The model could be falsified by the discovery of 'primitive monotheism' or abstract cosmological principles that did *not* emerge from integrations of primitive animistic traditions.

Claims that "primitive monotheism" *did* exist (typically identified with African, Australian, and American sky gods, etc.), supposedly antedating polytheistic traditions, were seriously raised in the first half of the twentieth century by the Catholic philologist and anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt, who waged a life-long battle against the evolutionary views of religion expressed by Spencer, Tylor, and Frazer, etc., as well as by "higher" biblical critics like Wellhausen.

Few academics today would publicly endorse Schmidt's ideas, let alone be tempted to wade through the twelve thick volumes of proofs he offers in *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* (1912-1955). But Schmidt had prominent followers in the first half of the twentieth century; moreover, echoes of his ideas continue in influential anthologies of religious texts like one compiled by Mircea Eliade, which opens with long selections on what Eliade labels "supreme beings," "great spirits," "high gods," "cosmic gods," and "all knowing gods," etc., supposedly representing primitive religious ideas in Australia, Africa, North America, Polynesia, South America, Japan, and India.⁷⁶ Given Eliade's continued influence in religious studies, at least in the United States, the result is that Schmidt's *Urmonotheismus* surreptitiously lives on, as do claims in other circles that monotheism was "invented" early in Hebrew history.

We acknowledge that early syncretic fusions of diverse deities or animistic forces, of the sort seen even in the earliest strata of the Vedas, were legitimate anticipations of the integrative forces that generated monotheistic gods in later periods of history. But dream-like (and temporary) mergers of animistic beings, which play a significant role in primitive ritual traditions, are far removed from Schmidt's concept of an *Urmonotheismus*, which supposedly preceded polytheistic concepts. Convincing evidence of the emergence of monotheistic ideas that did *not* arise from syncretic processes in textual traditions—a development that we consider to be highly unlikely—would present a major challenge to our model.

Questions concerning the origins of abstract cosmological principles raise more serious issues. One implication of our earlier discussion of hierarchical processing in the brain is that the concept of abstraction is a relative one: even the assignment of proper names involves relatively high levels of abstraction; the result is that sharp distinctions that are often made between "mythic" and "abstract" modes of thought in antiquity simplify a highly complex issue.

There is no doubt, in any event, that even totally preliterate peoples did associate some deities with more abstract powers than others. A classic example shows up in the fluid collection of Vedic gods known as the Ādityas, some of whom functioned at times as abstract gods of tribal or cosmic order or justice.⁷⁷ An even more abstract concept of truth, justice, or cosmic order was manifest in the Vedic concept of *ṛta* (which was closely associated with the Ādityas), the related idea of *aṣa* in Old Avestan traditions, the Egyptian principle of *ma'at*, and similar abstract ideas of order or truth in other early societies.

⁷⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

⁷⁷ For one study, see Joel Peter Brereton, *The Rgvedic Ādityas* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1981).

Nevertheless, an enormous gulf in degree if not kind separated these partly abstract and partly mythopoeic entities, which invariably remained closely associated with animistic deities, from the transcendent concepts of Heaven, the Way, Brahman/Ātman, the One, *Logos*, the idea of the Good, etc, that came to prominence in the Old World textual revolutions of the second half of the first millennium BCE. Our model could only be challenged by the discovery of transcendent principles of this latter sort that did *not* arise in layered traditions from earlier animistic bases, but emerged instead (as much of the traditional research implies) as free “inventions” of speculative genius.⁷⁸

3. The model could be falsified if conditions were identified in which high of levels of elite literacy and extended manuscript traditions existed but predicted ‘high-correlative’ structures were *not* generated.

Test #1: The problem of alleged manuscript traditions in the Western Zhou

Claims are frequently made that extensive and not just restricted literacy existed in China by the time of the Western Zhou, and possibly even in the Shang dynasty. Most prominently, Edward L. Shaughnessy has pictured the Western Zhou, apparently from its beginnings in the eleventh century BCE, as a “supremely literate society,” rightly credited by long Chinese tradition (despite the disbelief of “iconoclasts and the comparativists”) with composition of numerous texts including core layers of three of the Chinese classics—the Classics of *Documents*, *Poetry*, and *Changes*. Based on suggestions in cast-bronze memorial texts from the Western Zhou, Shaughnessy also pictures extensive state and family archives existing at a similarly early date, apparently containing texts written (as in the Warring States period) on bamboo or wooden strips. The implication is that China had high levels of literacy, at least in court circles, and extensive manuscript traditions at least 700 years *before* the explosion of high-correlative thought that began in the fourth century BCE—which we (and many other researchers) have associated with major textual revolutions in that period.⁷⁹

We acknowledge that high levels of elite literacy or the existence of extended manuscript traditions in the Western Zhou would constitute a serious challenge to our model. We nevertheless believe that future confirmations of these phenomena are highly unlikely. This follows since—leaving aside the three Chinese classics Shaughnessy mentions, whose dates are largely what are at issue—no traces exist in Western Zhou cultural artifacts (including cast-bronze texts) of the types of high-correlative thought that our model tells us to expect (and much comparative data suggest was found) in all premodern societies in which high levels of elite literacy existed. Nor

⁷⁸ Our views here can be usefully compared to the discussion of early cosmological developments in China found in Nathan Sivin, “The Myth of the Naturalists,” in *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), section IV, 1–33.

⁷⁹ Cf. Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 3 ff.; Shaughnessy, “Western Zhou History,” in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapt. 5.

can hints of such thought be found in major literary sources (including the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and early strata of the *Analects*) that are known for sure to date from many centuries later. The result is that our model suggests that Shaughnessy and other researchers expressing similar views have seriously overestimated the types and extent of literacy found in the Western Zhou. But we also concede that if future discoveries prove that these researchers are right and we are wrong, at a minimum we would be forced to make major adjustments in our model.

Test #2: Alleged manuscript traditions in the Indus Valley Civilization

Even more extreme claims of massive lost literatures have been made for the Indus Valley (or Harappan) Civilization that flourished ca. 2600 - 1900 BCE—contemporaneous with the early literate societies of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Encouraged by the discovery of many thousands of short inscriptions on Indus seals, tablets, copper plates, potsherds, and other durable goods, a long line of archaeologists and Indologists from the 1920s until the present has assumed that extensive lost literatures existed in Harappa which—given the vast geographical extent of the civilization—probably included substantial religious, historical, and even proto-scientific or philosophical texts. Since no Indus inscriptions have ever been found that qualify by any stretch of the imagination as extended “texts”—the average Indus inscription is less than 5 symbols long, and the longest on one surface (a highly anomalous case) carries only 17 symbols—the assumption has been all but universal that the Harappans wrote their texts, as Mohenjo-Daro’s most famous archaeologist put it, on “birch bark, palm leaves, parchment, wood, or cotton cloth, any of which would naturally have perished in the course of the ages.”⁸⁰

Substantial manuscript traditions in the Indus Valley would present an even more serious challenge to our model than confirmation of extensive literacy in the Western Zhou, since not a hint exists in the vast remains of the Indus Valley of the types of high-correlative artifacts that our model suggests should have been produced by *any* literate premodern society—let alone one that supposedly wrote long texts on perishable materials for some 700 years. If standard views of Indus “writing” were correct, the model described in our paper would be in serious trouble.

Puzzled that the predictions of that model clashed so violently with eight decades of Indus Valley research, in the summer of 2000 we began compiling lists of archaeological “markers” found in all premodern civilizations known for sure to have written extensively on perishable materials. These include those of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, Chinese, Persians, Hebrews, Greeks, Etruscans, Romans, Arabs, Mesoamericans, and (most importantly) the ancient South Asians once they unquestionably developed writing some 1500 years or so after the collapse of Harappan Civilization. A short list of those markers includes the production of texts of substantial length on potsherds, rock or cliff faces, building stones or bricks, frescoes, statues or votary objects, bronze vessels, sea or turtle shells, weapons, or similar

⁸⁰ John Hubert Marshall, ed., *Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilisation: Being an Official Account of Archaeological Excavations at Mohenjo-Daro Carried Out by the Government of India Between the Years 1922 and 1927* (London: A. Probsthain, 1931), Vol. I, 40.

durable goods *as well* as on perishable materials; archaeological remains of inkpots, writing utensils, or similar tools of literate technologies; iconographical evidence of scribes or texts; and evolutionary changes in scripts arising from the continuous pressures of copying long texts. Remarkably, not one of these markers—each one of which is found in all these other civilizations (even when no perishable texts have survived)—shows up in the Indus Valley.

Even more remarkably, not one of the thousands of articles and books written on the “Indus script” since the 1920s has mentioned even the most obvious of those markers, which on its own largely proves the case: the total absence in the Indus Valley Civilization, unlike all these other societies, of texts of any length on *durable* materials. When the extreme brevity of Indus inscriptions is viewed in the light of comparative evidence, the obvious suggestion emerges that not only did the Harappans not write long texts on perishable materials, but that ancient India’s most famous unsolved puzzle, involving its “undeciphered script,” is a non-problem—since Indus symbols do not appear to have functioned as part of a true script. This suggestion can be supported by much further evidence, including numerous anomalies in Indus symbol frequencies that are radically unlike those found in any known writing system in the premodern world.⁸¹

Afterword

The theoretical model discussed in this paper, which finds unexpected support in the latter discovery, helps belie traditional claims that the methods of the natural and cultural sciences are radically opposed—that historical researchers have no need for abstract models, the formulation of predictions and empirical tests, or computational tools routinely used in other fields of science. Ironically, the fact that claims of extensive literacy in the Indus Valley have gone virtually unquestioned since the 1920s underlines the fact that historical researchers are often blinded by unexamined models of the most elementary sorts. Making the heuristic assumptions of the cultural sciences as explicit, testable, falsifiable—and ultimately as disposable—as those in the hard sciences is among the most important requirements in the field.

The history of science is full of examples of discoveries that have followed unexpected mergers of fields or the wholesale adoption by one science of the methods of others. Frequently, these mergers occur in periods of rapid developments in information technologies that have repeatedly triggered major revolutions in human thought. We believe that many signs exist, promoted by obvious technological developments in our own period, that mergers of this sort are already underway that will drastically change our understanding of all of premodern history in the coming decades.

⁸¹ Discussions of this evidence have been presented by one of us (Farmer) at the Third and Fourth Harvard University Indology Roundtables, held in May 2001 and 2002. Initial work on the problem began with informal collaborations between Farmer and Witzel in July 2000. An abstract of a forthcoming paper, which provides evidence that Indus symbols were not linguistic but magical and ritualistic in nature, can be downloaded from <http://www.safarmer.com/Indus.pdf>.

Appendix: A Few Systematic Effects of Exegetical Strategies

The following is a short list, intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive, of a few exegetical strategies that had major systematic effects. The majority of these strategies had a reconciliative purpose: to harmonize traditions, to unveil the hidden unity in canonical sources, to reconcile new traditions with old ones, or to co-opt the ideas of warring traditions or subtraditions. Which strategies were preferred in different traditions—and hence which types of cosmologies tended to evolve within those traditions—depended in part on (1) the ease with which those methods solved given exegetical tasks and (2) the frequency with which those methods showed up in earlier layers of tradition. The inbreeding of traditions over long periods resulted in the cross-cultural growth of multilayered correlative systems that by late traditional times exhibited high levels of structural complexity, formal consistency, and self-similarity. Partially counterbalancing these developments were anti-scholastic (or classicist) movements that tended to grow in strength the further traditions drifted from the sense of their base texts; the seesaw battle of syncretic and anti-syncretic forces was a major theme in the history of thought that lasted until the final collapse of high-correlative systems in early modern times.

EXEGETICAL STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL BYPRODUCTS
Correlation of gods from different polytheistic traditions.	Gods of different traditions are ordered in abstract series, or viewed as bodily parts of superior deities, for reconciliative ends.	Generation of early pantheons of gods in ancient Egypt, Mesoamerica, India, Greece, etc. Similar tendencies in Chinese “folk” religion.
Fusion of different gods or concepts of god in one or more tradition.	Conflicting concepts of gods are fused to create transcendental deities.	Initial appearance of proto-monotheistic or monotheistic traditions.
Transcendent fusion of conflicting moral or intellectual concepts in one or more tradition.	Conflicting uses of terms are integrated to create abstract universal concepts.	‘Heaven,’ <i>dharma</i> , <i>Logos</i> , the ‘One,’ Platonic theory of ideas, etc. Abstract dualistic frameworks are created for later cosmological developments.
Paradoxical fusions of divine beings or cosmic principles.	Conflicting references to divine beings or cosmic principles are identified in paradoxical ways to demonstrate the unity of a body of texts.	Simultaneously transcendent and immanent gods; paradoxical Confucian-Daoist ‘Way’; Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu trinities; dualistic deities in Tibetan or Mesoamerican traditions, etc.

Assignment of divine beings, sages, or inferior creatures from various traditions to hierarchical or emanational series.	Key concepts in different traditions are harmonized by assigning those concepts to different levels of reality.	Grades of Confucian sages and worthies; Buddhist and Hindu avatars and saints, etc.; gnostic aeons and Neo-Platonic henads; orders of demons and angels, etc.
Syncretic fusion of multiple or conflicting stories concerning ancient sages, philosophers, and tradition founders in an evolving canon.	Multiple stories of sages, philosophers, and tradition founders are harmonized by transforming those figures into semi-divine or divine beings.	Eventual transformation of Confucius, Laozi, Socrates, Plato, Buddha, Jesus, etc., into semi-divine or cosmic beings.
Systematic correlations of conflicting references to single deities.	Conflicting references to a deity are identified as inferior manifestations of that deity.	Abstract schemas of the names and powers of god in Islamic and Christian scholasticism; the kabbalistic <i>sefirot</i> , etc.
Allegorical methods applied in hierarchical frameworks.	Abstract philosophical or religious ideas read out of (or into) non-philosophical works.	Intensified hierarchical visions of reality. Transformation of poetic and other non-philosophical works into cosmological treatises (Homer, <i>Spring and Autumn Annals</i> , etc.)
Allegorical methods applied in a temporal framework (typology).	Concepts or persons in earlier traditions are pictured as imperfect anticipations of concepts or persons in later ones.	Growth of analogical views of time in progressive (linear) frameworks.
Compilational or allegorical strategies applied in cyclical temporal frameworks.	Conflicting stories, concepts, divine beings, or temporal events in canonical texts are reconciled by assigning them to different eras in a cyclical temporal framework.	Multiple creations and destructions of the world in Greek or Mesoamerican traditions; concept of avatars and multiple Buddhas, etc.; reconciliative use of the "five phases" (<i>wuxing</i>) in Chinese historical writings.
Compilational strategies in hierarchical frameworks.	Conflicting stories, concepts, or cosmological schemes are joined in a hierarchical manner.	Multileveled visions of heaven and hell in Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Mesoamerican traditions; complex faculty psychologies; etc.

Syncretic syllogisms.	Disjoined snippets of texts are conjoined to unveil their hidden unities. Heavy use in Vedic, Neo-Confucian, Midrashic, and similar commentarial traditions.	Increased reverence towards holy books; intensified word magic, bibliomancy, etc.
Standard scholastic distinction.	Apparent conflicts in authorities are reconciled by adding appropriate verbal modifiers to the concepts of those authorities.	Reality becomes increasingly complex, correlative, and (normally) hierarchical.
'Double-truth' models.	Religious or philosophical authorities are reconciled by distinguishing complementary realms of truth.	Bifurcations of reality in the three-treatise school of Buddhism; similar developments in Neo-Confucian, Vedantic, Averroistic, and Latin scholastic traditions.
Mystical letter/glyph interpretations and/or anagrammatic manipulations of sacred canons.	Mystical letter/glyph interpretations and anagrammatic readings introduced to demonstrate the hidden unity of canonical texts.	Glyphomancy in China, anagrammatic manipulations of texts in India, the Middle East, and the West. Intensified linguistic realism, fusion of mysticism and calligraphy, etc.
Higher-level fusions of systems of correspondences.	Presyncretized (correlative) concepts found in earlier texts are conjoined in increasingly abstract forms.	Abstract numerologies of the type found in Shao Yong or Joachim of Fiore. Extreme syncretic-correlative systems with amplified magical properties in medieval and early modern times.

For detailed discussion of individual strategies, see Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary* and Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*. For discussion of exegetical methods opposing these strategies, see Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy*.

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Chinese Language Philosophy and Correlativism¹

by

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I. Introduction

This essay discusses the issue of “correlative cosmology” in ancient China by analysing correlativist aspects of early Chinese language philosophy.² Similar approaches have been taken by such important and influential sinologists and philosophers as Marcel Granet and, more recently, Roger T. Ames who have—in their respective ways—related Chinese correlativist concepts of language to a generally correlativist worldview of ancient Chinese philosophy. Granet’s *opus magnum* *La Pensée chinoise* begins with an analysis of Chinese language as a first step towards the unfolding of the great correlativist universe envisioned by the early Chinese mind. And when Roger Ames speaks of correlativity in regard to Chinese language, he understands this notion of linguistic correlativity as one element within a larger sphere of “correlative thinking.”³ Agreeing with the basic assumptions of these authors and with their attempts to explain a correlativist worldview or cosmology on the basis of linguistic correlativity, I will also focus on the latter in order to shed some light on the peculiar correlativism of ancient Chinese thought.

Unlike Granet and Ames, I will, however, not talk about features of the ancient Chinese language or of Chinese rhetorics, but strictly limit myself to an analysis of Chinese theories of language or the linguistic. My main hypothesis on early Chinese language philosophy (and thus *not*, as I just said, on the Chinese language or on Chinese rhetorics) and its correlativism is that it testifies to a construction of the linguistic based on a distinction between the realms of the languageable and the (radically) non-languageable. I believe that this distinction is at the heart of ancient Chinese language philosophy and that it provides a key not only to Chinese theories of the linguistic but also to Chinese correlativism. I also believe that an analysis of

¹ I am indebted to Ruskin Watts for translating the German manuscript of this article into English.

² I am well aware that it is problematic to apply the term “language philosophy” in its strict sense in regard to ancient Chinese philosophical reflections on “forms and names” (*xing ming* 形名), speech (*yan* 言), writing (*shu* 書) or literature (*wen* 文). Chinese philosophy did not operate with a general notion of “language” subordinating those concepts and establishing a general and explicit discourse of “language philosophy.” However, in this article I take the liberty to use the term “language philosophy” in a broader sense denoting the diverse theories of the above mentioned “linguistic entities.”

³ David Hall, Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 137.

this basic distinction may help to clarify the differences between ancient Chinese language philosophy and its Western counterparts which tend to be more concerned with another basic distinction, namely the one between the signifier and the signified. In the following, I will first briefly outline what I perceive to be the structural difference between those two distinctions. Then I will try to show how the ancient Chinese distinction between the languageable and the non-languageable underlies some important language philosophies in ancient China by analysing some relevant texts from political Daoism, from the *Xunzi* 荀子, and from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. Finally, I hope to be able to demonstrate the specific kind of correlativism implied in ancient Chinese language philosophy and how it relates to a “correlative cosmology.”

II. “Language philosophy” East and West

a) *Language and meaning*

Throughout the “mainstream” tradition of Western language-philosophy language has been continually, though by no means exclusively, understood and analysed as a means of expression, of signification, as a means of meaning in various senses, as a means of denoting that which is extra-linguistic. (This would, among others, not yet apply to Presocratics like Heraclitus, where language appears to have a character less of expression than of revelation, and it no longer applies to, among others, the later Wittgenstein, where the meaning of language is to a large extent reduced to its uses in practice.) It is hardly possible to bring the wide variety of philosophical approaches to language, from antiquity down to the modern world, under one common denominator, yet the discourse of language can nonetheless be characterized, I think, as circling with a certain persistence around a central problem: how is the relationship between language and that which is declared in it to be described? Or more simply: what is the relationship between language and its meaning?

Already in Plato’s *Cratylus* questions about the relation of the signifier to the signified are at the heart of philosophic discussion.⁴ Here, though in a rather restricted setting (which in some ways is reminiscent of ancient Chinese debates on the problem of the “rectification of names” [*zheng ming* 正名]) the concern is still with the possibility of a “natural” correctness of the names for things, that is, with the question whether names stand, or ought to, in a kind of mimetic-depictive relationship to what they signify, or not. In Aristotle’s short but influential account of the “genesis” of linguistic signs (things—mental experiences—spoken words—written words) in *De Interpretatione*, the guiding question has become the interrelation of differing forms of language expression on the one hand, and the “ideas” and “things” on the other.⁵ After Aristotle, the interest of language-philosophy turns, in the main, to the discussion of differently structured models of linguistic representation. Authorities like Augustine, Locke and Leibniz, later each offer comprehensive semiotic schemes for the description of the meaning ratio between linguistic expres-

⁴ A fine analysis of the philosophical positions presented in the *Cratylus* is offered by Timothy M.S. Baxter: *The Cratylus: Plato’s Critique of Naming* (Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill, 1992).

⁵ See *De Interpretatione*, 16a.

sions, mental contents and signified objects. A multitude of dyadic and triadic representational models was formulated, along with which a series of theories on the origin, development and nature of the human capacity for language and expression emerged, a series ranging, for instance, from earlier attempts inspired by theology (Aquinas, Cusanus) through early modern historical reflections (Rousseau, Vico) up to psychologically orientated studies in the twentieth century (Vygotsky, Lurija).

Within the wide variety of Western language philosophy between the Presocratics and the twentieth century, language was primarily conceived of as a medium of expression and a carrier for the denotation of extra-linguistic contents (mental and/or objective-real). This means that language was often imagined via a primary distinction between linguistic representation and that which thus is represented. Within this model, the represented does not itself belong to the linguistic, but rather provides a limit to the linguistic sphere. This limit might be, as with Aristotle in *De Interpretatione*, one between conceptions which are universally valid and the many spoken tongues varying from country to country. The limit is thus a boundary between knowledge of the world and its articulation. The limit might further be a boundary from God as the "inaccessible signified,"⁶ to which all speech and even the entire world bears witness without, however, reaching or ever completely achieving it. The limit becomes, in this model, with the linguistic and the sign on the one side and the extra-linguistic significant on the other, a border between immanence and transcendence. However this boundary might be drawn, it is a limit between language and its reference, between representation and presence, and it is the line along which sense is generated. With this concept of language a distinction is set up, marking apart that which is not language and which precisely therefore may come to expression in it. Language and the extra-linguistic imply each other, and out of their reciprocal reference meaning is supplied. The fundamental distinction is between language on the one hand and that which language indicates or represents (sometimes successfully, sometimes inadequately, as above in the case of God) on the other. The two sides may be related in various ways and thus various theories of language and meaning may emerge.

b) Language and power

The relation between language—or rather the linguistic sphere—and all that which, whether adequately or not, finds expression there, is also of importance for early Chinese philosophy, yet not, I believe, as fundamentally.⁷ Questions of meaning in the broadest sense also engaged the ancient Chinese philosophers. This chiefly

⁶ This translates the German expression "unerreichtes Signifikat" used by Stephan Meier-Oeser (1017) to characterize an aspect of Cusanus' theory of the sign. See his "Zeichenkonzeptionen in der Philosophie des Mittelalters" in *Semiotik: Ein Handbuch zu den zeichentheoretischen Grundlagen von Natur und Kultur*, vols. 1–2, ed. R. Posner et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997–98), 984–1022.

⁷ The issue of "expression" is quite important for ancient Chinese theories of literature, specifically in connection with interpretations of the *Great Preface* to the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經). A critique of conventional sinological interpretations of this text along with an alternative reading offers Martin Svensson: "A Second Look at the *Great Preface* on the Way to a New Understanding of Han Dynasty Poetics", *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 21 (1999): 1–33. While Svensson highlights an emphasis on (political and moral) "expression" in Han poetry (theory), he also acknowledges a direct relation of literature to the "Confucian power structure" (20).

involved the “correct” relation between names and what they signify. In his study *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*,⁸ John Makeham has concisely and lucidly surveyed the history of ancient Chinese philosophy of names, going from Confucius, the Mohist canon and the *Xunzi* 荀子, through the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 and the *Guanzi* 管子, up to the later Han period. Although I cannot agree with all details of his historical presentation (see my critique of Makeham’s section on the *Xunzi* below), it does offer an ample insight into the abundance of ancient Chinese name philosophy. The correct assignment of names to forms (*xing* 形) or “actualities” (*shi* 實) was widely taken to be a vital element in the creation and maintenance of social, political, ritual, moral and cosmic order. This chiefly involved considering the socio-political names of offices, titles, honours and punishments, but neither did it neglect the correct differentiation of the “myriad things” (ten thousand [kinds of] things, *wan wu* 萬物) in general, along with the consequent correct naming of things in the world and a common understanding of these.

Viewed historically, ancient Chinese “name-philosophy” did not lead, as was the case in Greek antiquity, to a general language-philosophy, in terms of a reflection on the medium of meaning as a whole and its relation to the extra-linguistic world denoted therein. The philosophy of names in ancient China, as expressed in the *Lunyu* 論語, the *Xunzi* and the *Hanfeizi* as well as in Xu Gan 徐幹, and given an exhaustive analysis by Makeham, was essentially a branch of the socio-political “philosophy of order and regulation” and thus took its place alongside thematically related reflections on the order and classification of man and world. These reflections could either be closely linked to a linguistic sphere, as in the considerations of human speech (*yan*), or be at quite a remove from it, as in the recommendations for political strategy and philosophy of morals and manners. The ancient Chinese language philosophy did not, then, develop into an autonomous reflection on the linguistic sphere as the sphere of meaning, but remained embedded in the structures of early Chinese thought on order, rule and power. For these reasons, as I will show in what follows, problems of meaning did not become the central problem in the early Chinese engagement with naming and speech. The fundamental philosophical distinction which accompanied the recognition of names and speech as a theme of deliberation, the primary frame within which reflection on the linguistic sphere moved, was not the difference of meaning between language symbols and their significance. Nor was it the difference between representation and the represented presence, between language and the extra-linguistic which comes to expression through it. The emphasis was rather on the order, government and *power* difference between the nameless and the named: between the field of the linguistic which contains naming as well as the named, and the field of the unnamed, the non-linguistic which rules over the whole linguistic sphere. The question of meaning and the difference between names and the named was kept independent of a distinction considered more basic, namely the difference between the linguistic sphere and that which does not seek or find expression in the linguistic process: not merely insufficiently expressible, but “language-less.”

⁸ John Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

III. Varieties of early Chinese language philosophy

a) Political Daoism

The “power difference” between the languaged and the non-languaged becomes clearly evident when one turns to the politically orientated texts of early Daoist philosophy. It is the same structural difference, however, as I hope to demonstrate, as that which determines the conceptualization of linguistic items like names and speech in the non-Daoist schools. As it is perhaps not so obvious there as in Daoism, and because Daoism has at times been regarded in the literature as somewhat at the margins of early Chinese philosophy of language,⁹ the importance of the “power difference” for the philosophy of names has to my mind been too little noted. In my view, the Daoistic distinction between the nameless (*wu ming* 無名) and the named (*you ming* 有名), along with the analogous distinction between not speaking (*bu yan* 不言) and speaking (*yan* 言), can quite definitely be considered as a structural paradigm for the conceptualization of the linguistic sphere within ancient Chinese philosophy as a whole.

As it is well known, in the *Laozi* 老子, the Dao 道 repeatedly appears as the nameless: its name is “unknown” (*bu zhi* 不知, chap. 25), it is “continuously nameless” (*chang wu ming* 常無名, chap. 32; 37) and simply “without a name” (*wu ming* 無名, chap. 41). It is the “nameless uncarved block of wood” (*wu ming zhi pu* 無名之樸, chap. 37).¹⁰ As well as being the nameless, in the *Laozi* and in Daoism in general the Dao is the ruling factor shaping the complete context of all that happens. It is the void middle, the empty centre of the whole. As the nameless, the Dao in a certain sense holds everything that has a name in balance from within. In the midst of the “myriad things,” as the empty hub of a wheel (*Laozi* 11), it is the hinge or pivot (*dao shu* 道樞, as the *Zhuangzi* has it)¹¹ which bestows its equilibrium on the process of the launching and fulfilling of world events and affairs.

As the discipline and teaching of the “nameless,” Daoism is at once the teaching of “not speaking” (*bu yan zhi jiao* 不言之教, *Laozi* 2; 43). The motion proper to the “natural” (*ziran* 自然) is like “silent speech” (*xi yan* 希言, *Laozi* 23), and whoever has an insight into the occurrence of all things “does not speak” (*bu yan* 不言, *Laozi* 56). In political proceedings and affairs, the function of the nameless Dao as the cardinal point of all occurrence is taken on by the ideal Daoist ruler who, as nameless as the Dao itself (in his namelessness he negatively calls himself the “abandoned” or the “orphaned” one, *gua gu* 寡孤, *Laozi* 39), resides in midst of the named, name-carrying and by-name-distinguished political organism. It is clear that the silent ruler corresponds to the nameless Dao.

The non-speaking of the ruler does not only correspond to the namelessness of the Dao, but to the well-known non-action (*wu wei* 無為) of both the Dao and the ideal sovereign. In the same way that through the non-action of the power-

⁹ Cf. Makeham, *Name and Actuality*. I tried to present a sketch of Daoist philosophy of language in *In der Mitte des Kreises: Daoistisches Denken* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 2001), 144–52.

¹⁰ For a little more detailed treatment of these and other chapters of the *Laozi* mentioned in this article I would like to refer to my translation and commentary in *Laotse. Tao-Te-King: Die Seidenmanuskripte von Mawangdui* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1995).

¹¹ *Zhuangzi yinde* (Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index series; no. 20, Peking 1947), 4/2/30.

centre all dealings in the world can run their “natural” and ideal, unobstructed and untroubled course and be completed to most effect, the ruler also, through his non-speaking, leaves the “speech activities” to run their “salutary” course. Namelessness, non-speaking and non-action are the qualities of the Dao and the sovereign in their capacities as ruling elements within that which they rule, the ruled, which correspondingly must be the named, the speaking and the acting. In the *Zhuangzi* it is said:

萬物殊理。道不私故無名，無名故無為，無為而無不為。

The myriad things have their respective patterns. Since the Dao [shows] no partiality [among them], it has no name. Since it has no name, it does not act. While there is no action [on its behalf], nothing is undone [*wu wei er wu bu wei*].¹²

This fundamental structure can apply as a cosmic universal for the world as a whole, it can apply to the living body with its heart as “empty centre” of the organism, or it can apply to the body politic, the political space. It is in the latter that it most clearly comes to light: the difference between the spheres of the nameless and of naming—which last, of course, consists of name and named, name and form (*xing* 形), name and “actuality” (*shi* 實)—is essentially a power structure. That which rules and has the power is nameless, while the names and the named constitute the field of the ruled. This structure of rule and power is illustrated in the setting of the passage from the *Zhuangzi* just quoted, as follows:

四時殊氣。天不賜故歲成。五官殊職。君不私故國治。文武，大人不賜故德備。

The four seasons have their respective Qi. Since heaven [shows] no partiality [among them], the year comes to completion. The five government bureaus have their respective functions. Since the ruler [shows] no partiality [among them], the state is well ordered. Since in both civil and military affairs, the Great Man [shows] no partiality, virtue [*de* 德] is complete.¹³

In nature it is the seasons, each specifically named and thus supplied with specific properties and distinguished from one another, which make up the year. “Heaven” which unifies them corresponds with the nameless Dao. The five offices have their distinct tasks: the field of the body politic is articulated through names (titles of office) and forms (the exercise of functions). Himself without office or function, without a *specific* field of authority, the ruler watches over the discharge of duties and thereby guarantees their order. All the nameable activities and objects which make up the myriad things are ruled by the unknown Dao as their empty centre, committed to no specific role.

This Dao, the void and undetermined ruling middle of all occurrence, is at the same time the “one,” the single centre, which joins and gathers all diversity to unity. The so called *Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor* which were discovered during excavations in the 1970s together with two versions of the *Laozi*, and which can now be considered key texts of Huang-Lao 黃老 thought, express clearly the relationship between “the one,” i.e. the empty, nameless and formless centre, which

¹² Ibid., 72/25/63–64. Trans. modif. Burton Watson, *The complete works of Chuang Tzu* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), 290.

¹³ Ibid., 72/25/62–63. Trans. modif. Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 290.

is the Dao and the ruler who occupies its place in the state—and the multitude of things and occurrences, which are nameable, notable, formal and formed, and thus ruled.¹⁴ Concerning the Dao and the ruler, who through it rules, it says:

一者其號也，虛其舍也，無為其素也 [...] 顯明弗能為名，廣大弗能為刑 [形]，獨立不偶，萬物莫能令。[...] 故唯聖人能察無刑 [形] 能聽無 [聲]。知虛之實，後能大虛 [...] 通同而無間 [...] 聖人用此，天下服。[...] 上信無事，則萬物周扁 [遍]。分之以其分，而萬民不爭。授之以其名，而萬物自定。

One is its name. Emptiness is its abode. Non-action is its nature.... It is splendidly manifest and yet it can not be named. It is omnipresent and yet it is formless. It is uniquely independent and is peerless. None of the myriad things can order it.... Therefore, only the sages can perceive the formless and can hear the [sound]less. If [a sage] can understand the reality of emptiness, then he is able to [abide in] the Great Void and ... will be completely together with [Dao] without anything separating him from [Dao].... When a sage-king applies this [Dao] in governing, All-under-Heaven will obey him.... If a ruler does not [actively] attend to affairs, the myriad things [including people] will find their respective places. They will, on their own accord, behave according to their designated station in life, and [therefore] they will not contend with one another. [Those above confer appropriate names, and] the myriad things, having received their respective names, will settle themselves [in their designated situations].¹⁵

This passage is only one of many in the *Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor* which describe the relationship of the nameless to the named.¹⁶ The nameless, formless, void, inactive centre rules all those “things” that are fixed by names and forms into their particular positions and functions: the people, objects and events, the “myriad things.”

With namelessness and formlessness, two other well known Daoist *topoi*, correspond: stillness (*jing* 靜) and non-speaking (*bu yan* 不言). The model we are now familiar with, namely the rulership of the nameless, formless and still, over that which has a name and a form and speaks, is not only found in the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* and the *Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor*, but in a multitude of texts in the circle of Daoism, Huang-Lao Daoism and Legalism.¹⁷ I would like to quote just one passage from the *Hanfeizi*, following John Makeham's translation:¹⁸

故虛靜以待令名自定也，令事自定也。虛則知實之情。靜則知動者正。有言者自為名。有事者自為形。形名參同，君乃無事焉。

[The ruler] waits in a state of vacuity and tranquillity letting a man's claim itself serve to nominate [a task], and letting [the completed] work be judged on its own merits. Being in a state of vacuity, he then knows what is genuine in actualities; being in a state of tranquillity, then those who act can be kept in

¹⁴ See the translation and commentary by Leo S. Chang and Yu Feng: *The Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 198–199.

¹⁶ See the index of the above mentioned English edition of the text for passages on “names/forms.”

¹⁷ Cf. my article “The Philosophy of Signs and Democratic Discourse: Coincidences between Chinese Pre- and Western Post-Modernity,” in *Justice and Democracy: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Ron Bontekoe and Marietta Stepaniants (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 395–404.

¹⁸ Makeham, *Name and Actuality*, 74. *Hanfeizi* (Sibu congkan edition), 1.8a–8b. In the context of his discussion of this passage Makeham does not comment on the distinction between the nameless and the named but on the specific usage of the term *ming* 名 (meaning here “word, speech, declaration, or claim” rather than “title of an office”).

order. Where there are words they in themselves function as the claim; where there is work, this itself functions as the form/achievement [*xing* 形]. If form/achievement and name are checked and they match, then the ruler is without concern.

This passage ought to make abundantly clear that the primary difference which shapes ancient Chinese discourse concerning the linguistic sphere is not actually any difference between name/form or name/actuality or claim/achievement, but the difference between the ruling realm of non-language and the subjugated reality of the languaged.

If this is not recognized, then ancient Chinese discourse concerning names and the linguistic can hardly be properly understood, not only in relation to politically-orientated Daoism and the associated schools of Legalism and Huang-Lao thought, but also, I maintain, in relation to the Confucianist expositions on the "rectification of names," and to the language-philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* (distanced as it is from the political). I would like to demonstrate this with two further examples. Both examples are usually regarded as texts which are concerned, not with a difference between the nameless and the named, but rather, in "Western" terms, with the meaning-relationship between names and things or, alternatively, between names and "mental contents." To my mind, such interpretations fail to gain access to the actual main assertions of both texts, which each precisely gain their relevance through the ancient Chinese distinction between the nameless and the named.

b) Philosophy of names in the Xunzi

The chapter in the *Xunzi* 荀子 concerning the "rectification of names" (*zheng ming* 正名) is considered one of ancient Chinese philosophy's most yielding and rewarding texts for the "philosophy of language." To my mind, it is exactly this chapter which provides excellent evidence that Chinese name-philosophy regards the relationship of sign to signified, of name to object, only as a function of that which supplies its foundation: the power difference between that which imposes and commands, and that which possesses and carries the names. Or to put it differently: even in the *Xunzi* the priority is not the grounding of a relation between names and things, it is not a foundation of the essence of symbols and language, but primarily, and precisely, the power margin, the differential between the named and the unnamed, whereby the unnamed in the *Xunzi*, as in the texts referred to above, is the ideal sovereign by whom the named, by way of the Dao, is "ruled."

Even in a text like the *Xunzi*, which is in many respects explicitly and implicitly opposed to Daoist and Legalist thinking and strategy¹⁹ and, in contradistinction to the Daoists, sets forth a political order which is to be established and upheld through the maintenance of ritual and of Confucian learning, training and refinement, a strict dichotomy is again elicited between sovereign and subject. And even in the *Xunzi*,

¹⁹ See, for instance, the end of chapter 17 ("Tian lun 天論") and chapter 6 ("Fei shi'er zi 非十二子").

the ruler occupies the centre and he restrains himself from thought and deed,²⁰ though without explicitly, as in the Daoist texts, being called the “nameless”—at least not in those parts of the work considered “authentic.”²¹ More importantly, as shown in the chapter on the “rectification of names,” the ideal sovereign rules inasmuch as he keeps names and the named in order. The philosophy of names, also in the *Xunzi*, is primarily a philosophy of the sovereignty over the named realm. It is the difference between the ruler, named by no one, and everything else, over which he has the right and power to exercise denomination, which informs the text and gives its tone and tenor.

In principle many scholars, commentators and translators, agree that the “Zheng ming 正名” chapter is a text concerning the art of government and that it is about the creating of political order via names. John Makeham appropriately comments:

However farfetched this may seem and however much it is at odds with some of the more influential modern views on language, it must be borne in mind that Xun Qing’s primary concern with names was pragmatic, not semantic.²²

In accordance with this, the “Zheng ming” chapter presents a relatively systematic instruction manual for the ruler how he must go about the giving of names. Fundamental terms, and therewith the fundamental orderly structures in society, namely the designations which regulate penal laws, official posts and matters of ritual, are to be taken over from earlier rulers. In other cases, where the correspondence between names and what they designate is to be correctly restored or even newly instituted, certain concrete rules are to be followed which, in some cases, are quite exhaustively described in the text. The object on the whole, as made clear by the text, is to clarify the following questions for the future ruler:

所為有名與所緣以同異與制名之樞要。

(1) the purpose for having names together with (2) what is the basis for distinguishing the similar from the different and (3) the crucial considerations for instituting names.²³

The chapter leaves no doubt that it is explicitly addressing a ruler with the purpose

²⁰ Chapter 17 (“Tian lun 天論”) says: “Not to act, yet bring to completion; not to seek, yet to obtain—this indeed may be described as the work of Nature. In such a situation, the [Perfect] Man, however profound, does not apply any thought to the work of Nature; however great, does not apply his abilities to it; and however shrewd, does not apply his acumen to it 不為而成，不求而得。夫是之謂天職。如是者，雖深其人加不慮焉，雖大不加能焉。” “The heart/mind that dwells within the central cavity is used to control the five faculties, it is called ‘the lord provided by nature’ (心居中虛以治五官，夫是之謂天君).” “Thus, [for the ruler], the greatest skill consists in what is not done; the greatest wisdom lies in what is not pondered 故大巧在所不為，大智在所不慮.” Quoted from the translation by John Knoblock, *Xunzi. A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol. III (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 15–16. *Xunzi yinde* (Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index series; no. 22), Peking, 1949, 17/62/6–7, 17/62/12, 17/63/16.

²¹ However, chapter 24 (“Junzi 君子”)—which some scholars believe to be spurious—has to say the following about the good ruler’s refraining from speaking: “Although he can speak with his mouth he awaits his officers before he gives instructions. He does not look yet sees, does not listen yet hears, does not speak yet is trusted, does not ponder over things yet knows, does not move yet accomplishes 口能言，待官人然後詔。不視而見，不聽而聰，不言而信，不慮而知，不動而功.” Quoted from Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 165. See *Xunzi yinde*, 24/91/1–2. See also the parallel passage in chapter 12 (“Jun dao”): *Xunzi yinde*, 47/12/64.

²² Makeham, *Name and Actuality*, 59.

²³ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 128. *Xunzi yinde*, 22/83/12–13.

of instructing him how to rule by means of a correct approach to designation. In the process, as John Makeham emphasises, it is “evident that for Xun Qing ‘the way of dividing reality into objects to be named’ was the prerogative of the ruler.”²⁴ The language-philosophical approach fundamental to the chapter is thus structurally the same as that of the Daoists, and of Xunzi’s disciple Hanfei and of Huang-Lao Daoism: the ordering of the world by an authority of nomenclature not itself subjected to denomination. The essential boundary does not run between names and “objects”—these are rather assigned a place together—but between the authority that exercises power over the rendering and regulation of names, and the realm of the named.

In spite of this, in my opinion, manifest grounding-structure of the “Zheng ming” chapter, it has been readily taken in recent sinological research as a text concerning a “conventional” theory of naming. John Knoblock, for example, ascribes to Xunzi in this connection the following basic position: “All Names are *entirely* a matter of convention.”²⁵ John Makeham, as well, conditions his statement quoted above concerning Xunzi’s “primary concern” as follows: “*Certainly it is true* that Xun Qing recognized the *essentially* arbitrary and conventional *nature* of the practice of giving names to objects...”²⁶ Both writers are referring in the main to a short passage in the “Zheng ming” chapter which they patently take as a general statement about the “essential nature” of “all names,” and which is translated by Knoblock (substantially the same as Makeham’s version though a little more literal) as follows: “Names have no intrinsic appropriateness....Names have no intrinsic object.”²⁷ I have demonstrated elsewhere why I consider this translation dubious and am of the opinion that the issue is not—either at this point or in the chapter as a whole—about the “essential nature” of the “all names,” but (as is to my mind clear from the context) only about a specific case of the ordaining of names by a ruler. I translate, therefore, the passage in question as follows:

名無固宜，約之以命。[...]名無固實，約之以命實。

If [certain] names do not have an established correspondence, [the ruler should] connect them with one by ordaining....If [certain] names do not have an established ‘matter of fact’, [the ruler should] connect them with one by ordaining a ‘matter of fact.’²⁸

The “misinterpretation” is, I believe, attributable to a failure to note the basic differential I have indicated, operative in the *Xunzi* as in most other texts of ancient Chinese language-philosophy: the *Xunzi* does not generally conceptualize the “nature”

²⁴ Makeham, *Name and Actuality*, 59.

²⁵ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 126 (italics added).

²⁶ Makeham, *Name and Actuality*, 59 (italics added).

²⁷ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 130. *Xunzi yinde*, 22/83–84/25–26.

²⁸ See my review of Makeham’s *Name and Actuality* in *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996): 479–83. My translation of *ming* in the sentences *ming wu gu yi* 名無固宜 and *ming wu gu shi* 名無固實 should be understood not in the sense of “all names in their essence,” but in the sense of “certain names,” which is supported by the immediate context within the *Xunzi*: the parallel sentences *ming you gu shan* 名有固善 and *wu you tong zhuang er yi suo zhe*, *you yi zhuang er tong suo zhe* 物有同狀而異所者，有異狀而同所者 are (as most commentators and translators agree) obviously not *general* propositions about names (*ming* 名) and things (*wu* 物), but *specific* propositions about certain kinds of names and things.

of “all names”—*nowhere is there talk, in any strictly language-philosophical sense, explicitly of “all names” or their “nature.”* The commentary on this passage by Yang Liang 楊涼 (9th century A.D.), which presumably influenced modern commentaries and translations, may suggest that Xunzi is saying: “names, *on principle*, are not fixed” (*ming ben wu ding* 名本無定). However, this may also be read as “If [certain] names have not been fixed [to a certain thing] originally.” Moreover, Yang goes on saying: “If a connection [of name and thing] is made in regard to heaven, then the people will call it ‘heaven’ 若約為天，則人皆謂之天也。” As the grammar reveals, Yang believes that it is not “the people” (*ren* 人) who make this connection, since they are not the subject of the if-clause of the sentence. The “connection” is not to be established through convention and by “the people,” but, obviously, by the decree of a higher authority.

While the *Xunzi* does not address the issue of the “nature of all names,” it addresses the issue of how the ruler has to rule with names. It is clear from the beginning of the text, that a varying procedure is called for, dependent on the pragmatic meaning of the names: the terms of the penal code are to be taken over from the Shang 商, those of offices and titles of honour from the Zhou 周, etc. For a multitude of pragmatically varied names, varied rules apply. One thing alone applies overall: the ruler has absolute power over the names and must, by the varied forms of names, divide the world into an ordered whole. He must ground and found, through his domination of names and things, a well-articulated and harmonic social structure.

The tendency of Western translators to estimate wrongly the main proposition of the chapter may lead to philological errors. This does not apply only to the key passage mentioned above, but to others as well. In spite of the surrounding context clearly and repeatedly addressing the ruler as the one who rules the names, one passage, for example, is translated by Knoblock as follows:

然後隨命之。同則同之。異則異之。

When all these have been done, *we* name things accordingly. If things are the same, then *we should give them* the same name; if they are different, *we should give them* different names.²⁹

“We,” in other words the plurality of ordinary people, should not, of course, in the *Xunzi*’s view, be giving names at all. A word for “we” is nowhere to be found in the Chinese text, simply because it is not in the slightest “our” role to manage names, only “his”: the sage monarch’s. This is in no way a trivial distinction. On the contrary, it strikes directly at the heart of the philosophy of names in the *Xunzi*. Xunzi is again and again insisting: it is precisely through the careless trafficking in names, the tampering by people (largely “wicked” philosophers, in “bad” treatments and new forging of terms), in taking on unauthorised the task of name-determination, that order is brought into confusion. Translations like the one quoted read a “Western” attitude to language into the text here which goes against its philosophic grain. This particular text is one variant of ancient Chinese philosophy of language which operates via the fundamental differentiation of a name-ruling authority and a realm of

²⁹ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 130 (italics added). *Xunzi yinde*, 22/83/21.

names which is in need of bringing and holding to order. Nowhere is there an appeal to “us” to gain an insight into the “nature of names.” Neither the *Xunzi* nor early Chinese philosophy in general tends towards such a “conventionalist” or “substantialist” view to language, or to linguistic items such as names. Thus, I largely agree with William G. Boltz when he highlights the following “linguistic and semantic aspect” of the “Chinese world-view”: “[it] invests words with a non-arbitrary semantic dimension, or ‘fit’....”³⁰

In this respect, the *Xunzi* is not a text which represents, in terms of language philosophy, a “conventionalism.” There are in fact several passages in the text which indicate, on the contrary, that *Xunzi* started from a position where a number of names possess a certain “natural” soundness and accuracy, a correctness, that is, bound not only by convention—a position analogous to that of Cratylus in the Platonic dialogue which bears his name. When *Xunzi*, for example, at the beginning of the chapter goes into the “names describing humankind 散名之在人者,”³¹ he does not only link his terms by their meaning, but uses characters which are also both phonetically and graphically linked:

生之所以然者謂之性。性之和所生 [...] 不事而自然謂之性。性之好惡 [...] 謂之情。

What characterizes a man from *birth* is called ‘nature.’ What is *produced out of* the harmony of *inborn nature* ... and what from *birth* is effortless and spontaneous are called ‘nature.’ The feelings of liking and disliking ... that are *inborn in our nature* are called ‘emotions.’³²

As Knoblock points out in his comments on this passage,³³ the Chinese words for “birth” and “produced out of” (*sheng* 生, **sring*), for “nature” and “inborn nature” (*xing* 性, **sring*h), as well as for “emotions” (*qing* 情, **dzjing*) are etymologically related in regard to their pronunciation as well as to their written form. This suggests that *Xunzi* perhaps assumed that the expressions mentioned are not simply convention, but in a strict “correlative” sense, belong to what they designate and correspond to this, in fact, as sound and word.

In another place, however, *Xunzi* does seem to advise the ruler to (conveniently) retain or return to established terms which have evolved out of custom, manners and mores, and thereby seems to allow to particular names, at least, a rudimentary kind of “conventionalism” in a certain sense—yet one which, unconditionally requiring the ruler’s authorization, can not remain a true conventionalism:

³⁰ William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1994), 174. Boltz refers here to the following remark by Roy Andrew Miller: “No name of anything, no word in the Chinese language, *was thought* to be of and in itself arbitrary, or in any way the result of an arbitrary agreement on the part of the society employing it. Everything in the cosmos and on earth was the way it was, and every word, or name, was the word or name it was, for a reason: and that reason was a reflection of cosmic order....” (“The Far East” in *Current Trends in Linguistics*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 1213–64, here: 1217, italics added.) Given this and taking up the methodological argument presented in the beginning of this article, one may doubt if the “linguistic aspects” pointed out by Boltz might not rather be qualified as “aspects of language philosophy.”

³¹ See Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 120. *Xunzi yinde*, 22/83/2–3.

³² Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 127 (italics added). *Xunzi yinde*, 22/83/2–3.

³³ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 120.



遠方異俗之鄉，則因之而為通。

For villages of distant regions that practice divergent customs, they [the wise “Later Kings”] relied on the standard terminology [of the Xia states] and enabled these villages to be put into communication.³⁴

Any “conventionalist” influence on the names must be authorized by the ruler and certain linguistic “conventions” established by tradition and habit (though by no means constituting the whole field of names, only a marginal area) require his standardisation.

Xunzi finally introduces a whole series of diverse strategies for distinguishing things by using names. These might have sensuous criteria (as things taste or smell different, sweet and sour and strange) or logical (as general and specific designations can be distinguished).³⁵ For Xunzi, there was no essential “nature” in a Western, Platonic sense unifying the relation between name and thing. Or alternatively: it was clearly not important for Xunzi to philosophically discuss such a notion.

A glance at the diversity of practical aspects which according to Xunzi are to be noted in the ordering of names shows that no general reflection concerning the substantial “nature” of the relationship of “all” names to what they signify is aimed at (and that is reason enough that in the *Xunzi* no blanket “conventionalism” is to be found). It is emphasized again and again, in contradistinction to any essence or origin theory that might apply to all names, that the relationship of name and thing must be “correct” in a practical sense, and that the ruler alone has responsibility for this correctness. This is what the “correlativism” of Xunzi’s name-philosophy consists of, and which he shares with ancient Chinese language-philosophy in general: between name and object there can be a correct and unequivocal correspondence, which so divides and dispenses the world and events, and draws the boundaries in such a way, that order, that is regulation, reigns. Xunzi’s linguistic correlativism, the correspondence between names and objects corresponds itself with a larger “cosmological correlativism,” with the hope for a correlative correspondence of all things and actions constituting the cosmos. Since all things and actions in the cosmos have names, the order of the cosmos corresponds with order of names and things. Xunzi’s chapter on names explains how linguistic correlativity is embedded in cosmic correlativity. Order in the state and in the cosmos goes along with order among names and things.

c) “Language philosophy” in the *Zhuangzi*

The same fundamental structure as that which gives form to the chapter on names in the *Xunzi*—the hierarchical distinction between the languagable and the non-languaged, the nominated and the denomination-free—also dominates another key text of early Chinese language-philosophy. As in the case of the *Xunzi*, failure to recognize this fundamental structure has led here as well, I think, to misleading interpretations. Whereas in the *Xunzi* it is interest in the “essence of the relations”

³⁴ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 127. *Xunzi yinde*, 22/83/2.

³⁵ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 129–31.

between word and thing which leads to misunderstandings, in the *Zhuangzi* “fishnet allegory” it is an interest in the essence of the relationship between language and mental contents which leads off onto false philosophic tracks. These areas of interest in the theory of language, which has carried such weight in Western philosophy, are of as little assistance in understanding the *Zhuangzi* as they are in understanding the *Xunzi*.

As I have explained elsewhere in greater detail³⁶ I suggest the following translation as an alternative to the standard interpretation of the fishnet allegory:

荃者所以在魚。得魚而忘荃。蹄者所以在兔。得兔而忘蹄。言者所以在意。得意而忘言。吾安得夫忘言之人而與之言哉。

A fish trap is the means to get hold of fish. [Only] by getting the fish, [can] you forget the trap. A rabbit snare is the means to get hold of rabbits. [Only] by getting the rabbit, [can] you forget the snare. Words are the means to get hold of intentions. [Only] by “getting what is intended” [triple meaning of *de yi*: i.e. by getting what one intends and thus by *being content* and thus *having no intentions anymore*], [can] you forget the words. How could it be possible for me to talk to somebody who has forgotten words? (*Zhuangzi* 75/26/48-49)

The text does *not*, I claim, appraise the relationship of words to thoughts (or meaning) in order to get out beyond language to its meaning. On the contrary, I argue that the Daoist sage is meant to leave all words and language behind, in that he makes himself free of all thoughts. I read the text as a teaching to instruct, not how to get true thoughts (namely through and beyond words), but how to get away from words altogether (namely by having no more thoughts). Although this passage differs from the *Laozi* and the *Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor* by not being about the political dominion over the named by the nameless, it still makes use of a structurally similar distinction: between the hierarchy of the linguistic on the one hand (words and thoughts, speech and contents, language and meaning) and the non-linguistic on the other (the Daoist sage). As pointed out in the above remarks on political Daoism, the wise Daoist ruler is identified with the nameless Dao. The Daoist “sage” in the *Zhuangzi* is not a political ruler, yet he is someone who, in identifying himself with the Dao, may not on any account be submitted to the linguistic sphere. Just as the Daoist ruler bears no title, no specific names, and is thus not limited to specific tasks, so is the Daoist sage in the *Zhuangzi* not limited by specific forms of speech to definite “thoughts” they signify. Just as the sage ruler is at home in the non-linguistic, so is the Daoist sage of the *Zhuangzi*. The non-linguistic is altogether the “non-thinking.”

The Dao is not, as is the Christian God in the semiotics of negative theology the “inaccessible signified,” that is always only inadequately expressed in words; it is not the perfect thought which words cannot quite reach.³⁷ It is what is not at all at home in the sphere of language and meaning: it is rather what holds the sphere of language and meaning together without itself being (either successfully or always deficiently)

³⁶ “Zhuangzi’s fishnet allegory: A text-critical analysis,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27.4 (December 2000): 489–502. See *Zhuangzi yinde*, 75/26/48–49.

³⁷ For a comparison between such a version of a religious semiotics as represented by Dionysios Areopagita and Daoism see my study *In der Mitte des Kreises*, 165–79.

indicated by it. Structurally, it corresponds to the ruler without a task amid all the tasks of state.

In the same way that the Daoist ruler practices no activities, the Daoist sage in the *Zhuangzi* has no opinions; the one is impartial to all affairs of state, the other impartial to all views. The Daoist goal is the achievement of this leisurely sovereignty over the linguistic, that which in its turn consists of names as much as of things, and of speech as much as of thought. It is on such sovereignty, which accompanies the distinction between a nameless Dao—and a myriad of named things, between a ruler “rectifying” the names—and the orderly events of state, that early Chinese language-philosophy is focussed.

The distinction between the realm of the nameless and speechless and the realm of forms and names and of thoughts and meanings is a structural pattern providing for a specific kind of correlativism: in the realm of the languageable forms and names are supposed to correspond to each other, and in the realm of thoughts and meanings, the latter form a correlativist whole. The Dao is the empty centre of the correlativity of Yin and Yang and of the sequence of the four seasons. In a structurally equivalent way, the non-linguistic is the empty centre of the realm of the languageable. This parallelism is demonstrated in the following passage from the *Zhuangzi*:

隱陽相照，相蓋，相治。四時相代，相生，相殺 [...] 此名實之可紀，精微之可志也。

Yin and Yang respond to each other, cover each other up and produce each other. The four seasons replace each other, create each other and extinguish each other [...] All this is to be grasped with forms and names and to be thought with refinement and subtleties.³⁸

The correlativist realm of the “myriad things” and their processing is the domain of names and forms as well as of thoughts. This realm is not the realm where the Daoist sage dwells:

睹道之人，不隨其所廢，不原其所起。此議之所止。

The one who has seen the Dao does no longer follow where all this goes and does no longer inquire where all this comes from. Here, the discussion ends.³⁹

The correlative process of coming and going which shapes the functioning of the cosmos and its “discussion” ends with the Daoist sage who dwells in the realm of the non-linguistic.

In the realm of the languageable “discussion” prevails. Yes and No, affirmation and negation form a correlative whole. The *Zhuangzi* explains—especially when one reads it along with the commentary by Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312 A.D.)—that the sage who identifies himself with the non-linguistic does not take part in these discussions. However, he does not deny the reality and importance of the realm of the languageable. By not taking part in the “language-game” he accepts it and provides it with an empty centre, just like the non-acting ruler provides the centre for all actions. When

³⁸ *Zhuangzi yinde*, 72/25/69–71.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 72/25/73.

the *Zhuangzi* says: "First, the pivot at the centre of the circle has to be there, so that the response will be endless 樞始得其環中，以應無窮，"⁴⁰ Guo Xiang comments:

夫是非反覆，相尋無窮。故謂之環。環中空矣。今以是非為環而得其中者，無是無非也。無是無非，故能應夫是非。是非無窮，故應亦無窮。

Now, affirmations and negations contradict each other and turn each other around. They follow each other without reaching an end. Therefore, there is talk of a 'circle.' The centre of the circle is empty. For one who takes affirming and negating as a circle and who is able to reach its centre, neither affirmation nor negation persist. Since for him neither affirmation nor negation persist, he is able to respond to all affirmations and negations. And since neither affirmations nor negations come to an end, his responding also does not come to an end.⁴¹

The *Zhuangzi* continues: "Affirmation becomes endless and negation becomes endless (是亦一無窮。非亦一無窮也。)"⁴² The endless spinning of the "discussion" within the realm of languageable is as endless and as correlative as the endless circle of the seasons and of Yin and Yang. Guo Xiang explains that its endless motion is established by an empty centre. The correlativity of cosmic change is balanced by the empty Dao and the correlativity in the realm of the languageable is balanced by a non-linguistic centre. The non-speaking and non-thinking Daoist sage embodies this sphere of the non-linguistic.

IV. Conclusion

The basis of the ancient Chinese conception of language discussed in this article is the hierarchical distinction between a centre subject to no linguistic distinctions and differences, and a peripheral assembly of circumstance borne around it, a linguistic sphere which consists in a duality of names and things, or of speaking and meaning. In the political or social fields, this more "fundamental" distinction is manifest as a difference between a ruler who regulates the names and his subjects who are bound and assigned by offices and titles (the names), or by pronouncements (the speech), to specific roles and duties. Here, in the "political" field, the non-hierarchical distinction which marks the "linguistic" sphere can be the difference between a "name" and the "performative" activity which is affixed to this name as its "meaning."

In the non-political philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*, the same hierarchic structure appears as a difference between, on the one hand, a Daoist sage who is void of any cognitive or linguistic processes, and on the other hand, all patterns of thought, all of which are necessarily committed via language to definite views. Here, as well, the meaning-relationship within the linguistic sphere (here not mainly referring to a name/form dichotomy, but to the relation between speech and thought) is differentiated from and subordinated to, but never annihilated by, the non-linguistic.

Problems of linguistic meaning are *not* primarily dealt with as problems of "representation" of a properly actual "presence" by means of a realm of signs which imitate or "take its likeness." Instead, the important distinction for ancient Chinese

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4/2/31.

⁴¹ *Zhuangzi jishi*, in *Zhuazi jicheng*, vol. 3. (Peking: 1954), 33.

⁴² *Zhuangzi yinde*, 4/2/31.

language philosophy was one that lies between a non-present and speechless “centre of power” and a periphery which is present, established by that centre, and to which speaking and signification belongs with all its inherent distinctions.⁴³ These distinctions, between name and form or speaking and meaning, are indeed subordinate to the non-linguistic centre, yet in relation to each other they are equivalent and of equal stature. Between names and forms, then, or speech and action, there is no “discrepancy of being” (no difference of quality, no essential gap or handicap of being): they are all equally elements of “reality.”⁴⁴ This means: names do not merely picture or image forms, they are not only “signs” or simply symbols of reality, but are themselves, as much as are the forms and things, real elements in a present world. Speech as well, like thought and action, is not only a communication “about” something real, but is itself an utterly real activity in the actual world. Linguistic “signs,” for instance names and speech, are as equally real as whatever they signify.

Names and forms, speech and thoughts make up, as much as actions and activities do, the realm of the “myriad things.” Grounded in their relationship to the non-present and “non-linguistic,” *it is this equivalent reality of signifier and signified which properly constitutes the “correlativism” of early Chinese language-philosophy.* In so far as names and speech are not merely representative signs but present entities corresponding to forms, thoughts or acts, they “correspond” to one signified. This “correspondence,” the bond of union between a real sign and its equally actual and effective signification, its “meaning,” reveals itself as order in the world and society. In the form of a “prescriptive” or “pragmatic” or “practical” correlativism, the reality of the linguistic is divided into names as real “institutions” in the world and their correspondingly real “forms” or “objects,” or is divided into “speech” as actual statements and the activities and thoughts corresponding to them. Based on an empty and non-linguistic centre a linguistic cosmos emerges. The correlativity within the rhythmic functioning of this cosmos corresponds to the correlativity of the linguistic entities (names and forms, thoughts and meanings, speech and performance) within it.

⁴³ In response to a remark by a reviewer of this article I would like to add that the specific descriptions of the relation between centre and periphery—especially in the field of political philosophy may well vary from philosopher to philosopher. It is not the aim of this article to provide a detailed analysis of the various versions of the centre-periphery relation in ancient Chinese philosophy, but to highlight its structural importance for a general understanding of ancient Chinese language philosophy and correlativism.

⁴⁴ A reviewer of this article asked the question of how to exactly define the notion of “reality” in this context. This is a difficult task. In the Western metaphysical tradition (at least since Plato) the distinction between reality and appearance has been of crucial importance. I think that in the Chinese case this distinction has not been so important and that both the language philosophies and the cosmologies under discussion in this article do not primarily operate on the basis of a reality/appearance distinction, but rather on the basis of a “reality-only”-pattern. Of course, there may be gradual differences within the general reality of the real.

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Correlative Cosmology: From the Structure of Mind to Embodied Practice*

by
Aihe Wang

I. Chinese Thought and Philosophy

"Correlative cosmology" is by now a familiar enough term, and a conspicuous enough area of investigation in Chinese studies, to need no introduction. Although the phrase "correlative cosmology" was coined by Western researchers to describe Chinese ideas of the universe, the forms of thought to which it refers emerged in the late Warring States period and retained their influence until the end of the Qing empire. Many myths tell of the origin of correlative categories and symbols as the source and pattern of human civilization, bequeathed to the early sages by Heaven itself. Modern scholars have devoted much effort to deciphering these myths and to reconstructing the actual history of "correlative thought" from the slim evidence contained in early-imperial bibliographies and biographies. *Liu jia yao zhi* 六家要旨 (*The Essentials of the Six Schools of Learning*), written by the Early Han Grand Historian Sima Tan (d. 110 B.C.) and survived in the *Shiji*, lists *Yin-Yang jia* as the first of the six schools of private learning, followed by Confucianism, Moism, Legalism, the School of Names, and Daoism, all prevalent at the end of the Warring States and early Han. It describes *Yin-Yang jia* as specializing in the orders of *Yin-Yang*, four seasons, eight Trigrams, and astronomy.² Another fragmentary historical record is about a later Warring State thinker named Zou Yan 驺衍, found also in the *Shiji*, who "deeply contemplated the waxing and waning of *Yin* and *Yang*," and "cited the cyclic course of the beginning and end of the Five Powers."³ Through a philosophical or scientific reading of these brief accounts, most modern scholars have interpreted

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² Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhounghua shuju, 1959), 130, 3288–92. The Chinese term *jia*, as in *Ru jia*, *Fa jia*, and *Yin-Yang jia*, has been translated as "schools" of philosophy. But this is really a Western interpretation of the Chinese term. *Jia* literally mean family and lineage, and the learning of *jia* (*jia xue*) is also an opposition to official learning (*guan xue*). It is probably closer to the conceptualization of ancient China to translate *jia* in this context into "lineage of learning." For a thorough critique of the Western conceptualization of "schools" of thought, see Nathan Sivin, "The Myth of the Naturalists," in *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1995), IV, 2–7.

³ *Shiji*, 74, 2344.

Yin Yang and *Wuxing* as belonging to the school of *Yin-Yang* philosophy, thus setting the framework for the study of Chinese cosmology. Until recently, both Chinese and Western scholars have been studying correlative cosmology mainly within this framework. Feng Youlan named the school "*Yin-Yang Wuxing jia*," categorizing it as a philosophical system that combines science and magic.⁴ Very much in agreement with Feng, Joseph Needham translates *Yin-Yang jia* as the "School of Naturalists," or "protoscience," and contrasts it to Han Confucian "phenomenalism" or "pseudoscience." Needham attributes the origin of the school to Zou Yan, whom he calls the "real founder of all Chinese scientific thought."⁵ Arguing against Needham, Benjamin Schwartz views Zou Yan as a pioneer of Han Confucianism, initiating the fusion of cosmology and Confucian values, rather than a "naturalist" or "proto-scientist". He further asserts that Chinese correlative cosmology was primarily concerned with politics, history, and values, rather than with the "disinterested" study of nature or technology. But like Needham, Schwartz too identifies Zou Yan as the founder of the school, the one who "first posited a vast imposing specific system embracing all phenomena both human and natural," even though he thinks it reasonable to seek the beginnings of correlative cosmology in tendencies emerging before Zou Yan.⁶

Outside the realm of philosophy, however, the profound social, cultural, and political implications of correlative cosmology began to be noticed in the early twentieth century. Responding to the challenge of Western modernism, Chinese intellectuals debated between the total rejection and preservation of Chinese tradition. During this debate, *Yin-Yang Wuxing* cosmology emerged as a focus of attention. The leading critics of Chinese culture and history, Liang Qichao and Gu Jiegang, identified *Yin-Yang Wuxing* as "the headquarter of Chinese superstition for two thousand years," and "the law of Chinese thinking."⁷ Gu Jiegang dedicated the most thoroughly researched volume of *A Critique of Ancient History* (*Gu shi bian* 古史辨) to the subject of *Yin-Yang Wuxing*. In seeking a larger political context for the emergence of *Yin-Yang Wuxing*, Gu traces the textual history of classical canons, and concludes that Wang Mang and his supporters had created the cosmological theory and inserted it into canonical texts, as a way of gaining a divine justification of his usurpation of imperial power. Besides being outdated by newly discovered textual evidence, this view gives the impression that the emergence of cosmology was due mainly to the political aspirations of a few politicians. This is insufficient methodologically because it cannot explain the pervasive and enduring cultural and social applications of correlative cosmology, which persisted many centuries after the time of Wang Mang and penetrated all levels of social and cultural life.

Within this diverse body of scholarship, the persistent quest for the origin of cos-

⁴ Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo zhhexueshi xinbian* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), 2, 299–301; 316. Feng's view is consistent with his earlier studies of the subject in 1948. Feng Youlan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 129–41.

⁵ Joseph Needham and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 2, 232–53.

⁶ Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 356–59.

⁷ Liang Qichao, "Yin-Yang Wuxing shuo zhi laili," in *Gushi bian*, ed. Gu Jiegang (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), vol. 5, 343. Gu Jiegang, "Wude zhongshi xia de zhengzhi he lishi," in *Gushi bian*, 5, 404.

mology has reflected one predominant assumption, which is to see *Yin-Yang Wuxing* cosmology as a particular Chinese way of thinking essential to Chinese culture. The ancients claimed it to be the source of Chinese civilization. Modern intellectuals too saw it as the foundation of Chinese tradition, and therefore the biggest obstacle to modernization.⁸ Most scholars, both Chinese and Western, have treated Chinese correlative cosmology as an indigenous school of philosophy, to be contrasted with Western philosophy ranging from Platonic metaphysics to modern science.

This common presumption of the uniqueness of Chinese correlative cosmology has raised two fundamental theoretical questions in the study of Chinese cosmology, and in the study of the human mind in general. The first is the paradox of the universality and particularity of correlative cosmology as a mode of thinking. Is correlative cosmology, and correlative thinking more generally, uniquely Chinese, or is it universal to all cultures? If it is universal, then is it an evolutionary stage of human intelligence common to primitive, pre-modern and proto-scientific thinking, or is it a universal mode of thinking paralleling other modes of thinking in all time periods? The second question concerns a basic presumption of the first one, that is, whether cosmology should be treated solely as a mode of thought in the first place. Should it be confined to the domain of the human mind, or should it be mapped onto the much larger realm of political power, practice, action, and embodied social life? This second question has become more acute since the 1970s because newly discovered almanacs and other practical texts reveal cosmology being applied to the regulation of the body, time, and space in everyday life. At the same time, social science theory in general has shifted greatly, from a structuralist concern for universality and typology to a more contextualized concern for power and practice.

The exploration of these two questions has gone beyond any single discipline, and has been invigorated by dialogue among diverse theoretical discourses. This article sketches out some major shifts in the study of correlative cosmology in this intellectual context. Instead of attempting an exhaustive discussion of the state of the field, it will focus only on points of intersection where different theoretical discourses and disciplinary methodologies have interacted and transformed. In the following, I will show how structuralism has addressed the problem of universality and uniqueness in Chinese correlative cosmology. Subsequent sections will outline the shift of scholarly attention from mind to body and from theory to practice within the parallel development of Sinology and social science theory.

II. The Universal Structure of the Human Mind

The issue of the universality of correlative cosmology was first addressed by structuralist sociologists and anthropologists. In the early twentieth century, about the time when Liang Qichao and Gu Jiegang were attacking *Yin-Yang Wuxing* cosmology as the *particular* Chinese way of thinking, European sociologists took notice of Chinese correlative cosmology for its value in revealing *universality*. In his master-

⁸ The search for the essence of Chinese culture as part of conceptualizing modernity was revived after the 1980s. See Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19–20.

piece *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (*The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1912), Durkheim set out to discover the essential, permanent, and universal law of human society, concluding that concepts can form only because they are fundamentally social, functioning as “collective representations” of a society.⁹ It was within this structuralist framework that Durkheim and Mauss included in their *Primitive Classification* data about Chinese correlative systems—the four cardinal points (*Sifang* 四方), binary divisions (*Yin-Yang*), the Eight Trigrams, the five elements (*Wuxing*), the twelve months, the twenty-four seasons, and so on. They believe that Chinese correlative systems, like all other primitive classification systems, are “modeled upon” pre-existing social structures, originate and function as “collective representations,” and reflect the “most fundamental forms of social organization.”¹⁰

While Durkheimian *social structuralism* attributed the origin and function of classification to social systems, *symbolic structuralism* led the search for the universal law of the human mind in an opposite direction. Lévi-Strauss's *La Pensée sauvage* (*The Savage Mind*, 1962) investigates classification systems—including totemism, myths, and magic—as a mode of thinking that correlates phenomena found in the natural world with phenomena in the human world, what he calls “*la pensée sauvage*” or “science of the concrete,” which parallels the science of the abstract as one of the twin modes of scientific thought.¹¹ Similar to Durkheim in searching for a universal law of the human mind, Lévi-Strauss nevertheless negates Durkheimian social determinism, attributing ontological and analytical priority to the structure of the human mind rather than to the structure of society. He states that symbolic classifications are structures of mind having their own logic and dynamic, developing independently from society. The logic of symbolic ideas governs the life and thought of the society, being the internal and necessary structure moving towards order, while social events are external, contingent forces of disorder.¹² The origin of symbolic systems thus lies in human beings' desire for intellectual order, and the function of such systems is to serve as a logical grid enabling the organization of a sociological field—not to maintain the equilibrium of a prior social structure.

Although the two approaches are polarized in attributing the causal, logical, and functional primacy to either the social structure or the symbolic structure of the mind, they have important similarities. Both the social and symbolic forms of structuralism share the basic orientation of seeking universal laws of the human mind in the elementary, simple, or primitive forms of symbolic systems, while rejecting an evolutionary explanation for different modes of human thought. Both treat symbolic systems from various cultures, including Chinese, as examples of universality rather than as heterogeneous cultural types for ethnographic comparison. In other words, it was the common laws of humanity, rather than uniqueness of the indigenous cultures, that concerned them. And both are devoted to the permanent logic of a struc-

⁹ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1965).

¹⁰ Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 67–74, 82–4.

¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

¹² Ibid.

ture rather than to empirical facts or actual historical events, which to them are noise or distractions obscuring the basic structure.

The greatest contribution of structuralism to the study of Chinese cosmology has been to treat cosmology and society as parts of a single, structurally interrelated system. This holistic approach has liberated cosmology from the limited confines of pure philosophy. Structuralism's most direct impact on Sinology came through the work of Marcel Granet. A pupil of Durkheim, Granet also studied with the great French Sinologist Chavannes and devoted his academic life mainly to the study of Chinese civilization as represented in its classical texts. His brilliant works have remained a great inspiration even though new empirical data has forced scholars to abandon some of his concrete conclusions. His *La Pensée chinoise* (1934) sets out to use Durkheimian sociological methods to analyze the Chinese conceptual world. Granet describes Chinese cosmology—including the concepts of time, space, *Yin-Yang*, and numerical and divination systems—as being “correlative”, composed of “correspondences and oppositions.” Calling it “la pensée chinoise” or “the Chinese mind,” he sees correlative cosmology as the “structure of thought” for Chinese civilization. Unlike his master Durkheim, who characterized Chinese classification systems as “primitive,” Granet instead depicts Chinese correlative cosmology as being a highly ordered, logical, and sophisticated system, based on the logic of numbers and unfolding from the logic of symmetry and centrality. With this cosmology functioning as the basic structure of classification and as protocol, Chinese civilization, throughout its long history, has been the gradual development of its structural principles with little novelty produced.

It is time to clarify the intellectual heritage from Granet. His fundamental interest in China was sociological rather than Sinological; or more precisely, his ultimate goal in his lifetime study of classical China was to identify not the uniqueness of China itself but the universal law of humankind.¹³ Although focusing on China alone, Granet maintained complete fidelity to Durkheimian sociological methodology, as reflected in his consistent interest in the universal law, his devotion to textual sociology rather than comparative ethnography, and his insistence upon treating society across time.¹⁴ Therefore, unlike most Sinologists whose interests rest on the uniqueness and richness of China's long history, Granet's project was a total analysis of Chinese society and thought, reducing the complexity of Chinese civilization to a few fundamental principles such as correlative thinking. In doing so, he was not interested in essentializing China as a unique culture or a prototype of the mind of the East, to be compared and contrasted with that of the West, such as in the formulations of the “Oriental Despot,” “Hydraulic Society,” or “Confucian Culture”. Quite to the contrary, he refused explicit comparison and insisted upon using the study of China as a way of understanding humanity as a whole. In his own words: “By its extent, its duration, its mass, Chinese civilization is one of the most powerful creations of mankind; none other is richer in human experience. Yet it is infinitely

¹³ To quote from Maurice Freedman's introduction to Granet's *The Religion of the Chinese People* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), Granet once declared to his class: “La Chine, je m'en fous. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est l'Homme.” (I don't give a damn about China. What interests me is Man.)

¹⁴ Ibid., 10–29.

¹⁵ Quoted from *ibid.*, 28.

less familiar to the public than the Mediterranean civilizations . . . Man will know himself only if he knows all the ways of being human. To achieve that, he must leave home in order to find himself."¹⁵ Using Freedman's summary, Granet was "a universal humanist for whom the study of Chinese civilization was a way of breaking out of the confines of European provincialism and of exploring alternative cultural worlds."¹⁶ This dedication to universality not only identifies Granet as a loyal student of Durkheim, but also points to the intellectual parallels between his *La Pensée chinoise* and Lévi-Strauss's *La Pensée sauvage*.¹⁷

But Granet's intellectual life illustrates the paradox of universalism—the universal law of human society and thought has to be drawn from different, unique cultures, and a culture such as China is worth studying in search of universal laws precisely because of its difference from what is familiar and known. In part because of this paradox, Granet has often been (mis)read as a specialist of Chinese classics and an essentializer of a unique Chinese culture. Many interpretations have built on Granet's depiction of Chinese correlative cosmology to construct a primordial and quintessential "Chinese mind,"¹⁸ equating it with the mind of the "other" or the East, to be contrasted with Western rationality. Ironically, therefore, Granet's universalist and humanist search was often used to highlight the uniqueness of and the difference between the East and the West. It was only a half-century later, in the 1980s, that Granet's universalist interest in Chinese correlative cosmology was restored, with great modification, by A. C. Graham.

Through the introduction of Granet, many scholars have adopted the structuralist approach to Chinese cosmology and further developed Granet's themes. For example, Needham, in search of the origin of Chinese scientific thought as mentioned earlier, elaborates on the theme that Chinese correlative thinking was not a mode of primitive thinking, because it depicted a highly and precisely ordered universe rather than an illogical or prelogical chaos.¹⁹ And Derk Bodde elaborates Granet's structural principle of symmetry and centrality in explaining the growth of Five Phases cosmology.²⁰ And John Major traces the structural origin of cosmology to the numerology of the magic square.²¹ But it is A. C. Graham who has truly appreciated Granet's universalist project and actually completed it, with renewed intellectual strength from other disciplines and a heightened historical awareness.

An authority on Chinese philosophy, linguistics, and classical texts, Graham combines comparative philosophical and historical approaches with sophisticated structural analysis in his study of Chinese correlative cosmology. By integrating structuralism, philosophy, and history, his two seminal works (1986 and 1989) not only brought the best aspects of these traditions to a conclusive summit, but also sparked debates that have opened new directions of research into Chinese cosmology.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 27.

¹⁸ See the summary of this trend by Schwartz, *The World of Thought*, 351.

¹⁹ Needham and Wang, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 2, 286.

²⁰ Derk Bodde, *Chinese Thought, Society, and Science* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).

²¹ John S. Major, "The Five Phases, Magic Squares, and Schematic Cosmography," *Journal of American Academy of Religion Studies* 50.2 (1984): 133–66.

Graham's analysis of Chinese correlative cosmology is three-fold. The first aspect is historical, in which he concludes that correlative cosmology is not a primordial and quintessential "Chinese mind," but rather a historical phenomenon that appeared only at the end of the classical period, as part of the formation of an imperial administrative apparatus and ideology. He identifies the historical agents responsible for the origin of cosmology as technical professionals such as court astronomers, diviners, musicians, physicians, etc. Correlative cosmology thus originated in the field of "proto-science" rather than philosophy, driven by technical professionals rather than philosophers and designed for practical use rather than political ideology. It was only at the dawn of imperial time when Zou Yan—one such professional (*fang shi*), according to Graham—became influential on the rulers that philosophers began to be interested in cosmological speculations and eventually integrated cosmology into the new state ideology.²² Graham's historical conclusion was further supported by the extensive research in technical tradition by Harper and Li Ling, which will be discussed in the next section of this article.

The second dimension of Graham's study is the structural analysis of the correlative systems. Graham conducted the most elaborate analysis thus far of the structural logic of the *Yin-Yang* and *Wuxing* systems and the mental processes behind their development. Adopting the structuralist approach of Saussure's linguistics, Graham describes *Yin-Yang* as a basic linguistic structure for ordering the chain of binary oppositions, unfolding the structural principle of symmetry. Analyzing the syncretist Han text *Huainanzi*, Graham shows how its cosmogony portrayed the cosmos as evolving by division along a chain of binary oppositions, and how cosmology was achieved by a complex system-building of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations among these oppositions.²³ The system of *Wuxing* involves a much more complicated structural evolution. Graham details this evolution as starting from combining the Five Phases of *Wuxing* with the Four Seasons and Four Directions, with this correlation of fives and fours resulting in one leftover term, which became the "center." The magic squares (of *Hetu* and *Luoshu*) and the numerology of *Wuxing* were then derived from this insertion of a center, a fifth term, into the binary oppositions of the fours. He attributes the discovery of the magic square and the numerology of *Wuxing*, with numbers adding up to 15 in every direction, to the numerologists' search for "some fascinating symmetry," and he imagines the joy and wonder of discovering this secret order of the cosmos. Whether this discovery was historically made this way or not is unimportant; it is the structural logic of the mental process that is his prime concern.²⁴

The third dimension of Graham's analysis is philosophical. Here he finally completes the universalist project of Granet, Lévi-Strauss, and structuralism. He declares that correlative thinking is not uniquely Chinese or primitive, but rather a universal mode of thinking that is "going on all the time in the background of every other kind of thought."²⁵ Graham here diverges from Granet's portrayal of correlative cosmol-

²² A. C. Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), 1, 8–15, 91–2; and Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), 313–4, 328.

²³ Graham, *Yin-Yang*, 16–41; *Disputers of the Tao*, 331–5.

²⁴ Graham, *Yin-Yang*, 42–57, *Disputers of the Tao*, 340–9.

²⁵ Graham, *Yin-Yang*, 1, 16.

ogy as being specifically *la pensée chinoise*. Historically, Graham believes, correlative cosmology in China belonged not to philosophy but to the domain of proto-science, and existed in Western proto-science and religion as well. To compare Chinese cosmology with Western philosophy is thus to compare incomparable types of thought. Within philosophy, furthermore, both Chinese and Western forms of philosophy are built on a submerged stratum of correlative thinking embedded in human language itself and underlying all upper layers such as logical, causal, philosophical, and scientific thinking. Correlative thinking is not only common to both China and the West, it also provides the building blocks for all thought. Therefore, just because it is more exposed in China, one cannot label it a structure of the "Chinese mind" to be contrasted with the analytic upper layers of thought labeled "Western."²⁶

If one accepts that Granet's project was to know mankind through knowing China, Granet traveled only halfway towards his ultimate goal; he "left home" and discovered the Chinese mind. Graham completed the journey by finding that "*la pensée chinoise*" actually exists in all cultures and times, as a universal mode of thinking not at all uniquely Chinese. By negating *la pensée chinoise*, Graham brought home Granet's project, and rediscovered a much more complex Western "self". The similar concern of the universality of human mind has also occupied the mind of Needham, whose monumental project on the science and civilization of China was aimed at revealing how different civilizations, China as an important one, have contributed to a single, universal science of humankind.²⁷

While Graham's arguments have gained tremendous authority in Chinese studies, they have also provoked sharp controversy and criticism. The greatest controversy of Graham's work concerns not his universalist claim but the historical argument supporting it. Nathan Sivin has made a vigorous counter-argument, staunchly opposing Graham's historical conclusion that cosmology originated from technical professions; "cosmology," Sivin writes in a 1992 review of Graham's book, "entered the technical world from philosophy, not vice versa."²⁸ In a later article, Sivin provides a more elaborate outline of the origin and development of correlative cosmology in the philosophical tradition, from Zi Si 子思 and Mencius to *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, and completed by *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 and *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經.²⁹

This controversy, however, cannot be resolved simply by the availability of new empirical data. Going well beyond the historical facts, it cuts right to three methodological problems that lie at the core of Chinese studies. The first is the analytical categories, such as "schools" of "philosophy" and "technical professionals." Sivin finds Graham's historical claim most unpersuasive because it is dependent upon these "mutually exclusive but undefined categories." In the case of ancient China, he argues, the technical traditions did not begin to separate out of philosophy until about 200 B.C. He emphasizes that imposing these modern Western concepts on

²⁶ Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*, 1–8, 23; *Disputers of the Tao*, 313–25, 331, 338–40, 350–1.

²⁷ Sivin, "Editor's Introduction," in Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* 6.6, 1, 7.

²⁸ Nathan Sivin, "Ruminations on the Tao and Its Disputers," *Philosophy East and West* 42.1 (1992): 21–29.

²⁹ Nathan Sivin, "The Myth of the Naturalists," in *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1995), IV, 2–7.

ancient China is part of a natural tendency of Sinology toward anachronism and Westernization, which confuses the history of Chinese thought.³⁰

A second problem is its overwhelming concentration on the mind (i.e. philosophy, schools, and concepts) and neglect of the body (i.e. technical practices and everyday life). Sivin praises Graham's 1989 book for bringing scientific texts into the study of Chinese thought, thus breaking the "awesome Sinological taboo against reading scientific texts."³¹ While most intellectual historians of China agree that cosmology originated from proto-science,³² their own domain of inquiry remains the field of philosophy, leaving the technical traditions to historians of science, medicine, or religion. This preoccupation with the mind results in a construction of Chinese culture as purely "humanistic," based on philosophical tradition, especially the Confucian doctrines that became official orthodoxy. After Graham suggested the possible interactions between technical and philosophical traditions, research into the technical tradition is now flourishing under the stimulation of abundant new evidence discovered over the past two decades, as I shall discuss in the next section. The progress in shifting away from the mind centered approach is evident in the recent *Cambridge History of Ancient China*, in which the philosophical and technical traditions are represented side by side and treated with equal attention.³³

The third methodological problem highlighted by this debate is the division between the world of the political and the world of the technical. Graham's historical conclusion is that correlative cosmology entered the field of philosophy only at the dawn of the imperial era, when philosophers imported cosmological thinking from technical professionals in creating a state ideology. The implication of this argument is that correlative cosmological thinking existed in the technical world, as a basic structure of thought and function of language, long before it became a political ideology. Sivin poses his counter-argument that *Yin-Yang* and *Wuxing* cosmology was "moral and political from the start," and in the long sweep of Chinese thought remained "simultaneously political, moral and naturalistic."³⁴ To support this argument, Sivin states that intellectuals, who built the cosmological system to prove that the state was natural, only borrowed from technicians their jargon, a few of their metaphors, and a modicum of lore. And the technicians later borrowed the medical doctrine of the body as microcosm from mainstream political philosophy.³⁵ On this point the views of Sivin and Graham are not as incompatible as they seem, for they both point to the intellectual construction of an imperial ideology as the driving force for cosmological system-building. But a more important yet less noticed point Sivin makes is the social and political function of the technical texts themselves. He mentions that the technical classics of the Han are hardly less ideological than their philosophical precursors, and that to think of the technical interpretations of

³⁰ Sivin, "Ruminations on the Tao," 23; "The Myth of the Naturalists," 1-2, 28.

³¹ Sivin, 1992, 21.

³² Feng Youlan, for example, also points out that *Yin Yang jia* probably developed from the practical arts (*shushu*). Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo zhhexueshi xinbian*, vol. 2, 300.

³³ Michael Loewe et al, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁴ Sivin, "Comparing Greek and Chinese Philosophy," 5; "The Myth of the Naturalists," 29.

³⁵ Sivin, "Ruminations on the Tao," 23; Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.1 (1995), 30-31.

cosmology as simply specialized technical concepts is “to ignore their ubiquity in everyday thought at every level of society, and to overlook their social and moral meaning.”³⁶ It is in this direction that research in Chinese cosmology has plenty to discover, as I shall elaborate on in the next two sections.

From Durkheim’s initial interest in Chinese cosmology to Graham’s influential conclusion, the structuralist approach has thoroughly negated the perception of correlative cosmology as unique to any specific culture, and has thus embraced the study of Chinese cosmology within the search for a universal law of humanity. This extensive inquiry has also revealed the paradox of universalism and cultural essentialism, a paradox signaling the limitation of structuralism. The debate between Graham and Sivin has also highlighted other methodological problems that are deeply embedded in Sinological discourse. The limitations of structuralism and the methodological problems of Chinese studies have become more visible recently, partially due to the increased abundance of new sources on the subject over the past three decades. Yet more importantly, the surfacing of these limitations and problems reflects a larger theoretical movement away from structuralism and universalism, towards a critique of the basic analytical categories in the social sciences and humanities—categories such as politics, power, culture, religion, and science.

III. From Philosophical Theory to Technical Practice

Since the 1970s, archaeological discoveries in China have provided a body of new sources on early China, and the analysis of these newly discovered texts written on silk and bamboo strips has become a flourishing field of study.³⁷ However, this new empirical data has not helped scholars to resolve their debates and methodological problems discussed above, but only heightened them. The drawback of separating the mind from the body is more visible, the boundaries separating the “political” and the “natural” are more problematic, and the intersection and mutuality of what used to be seen as exclusive and separate domains of reality has begun to attract far more scholarly attention.

Some scholars are using the new sources to further the pursuit of the philosophical origin of cosmology, with a particular interest in the early affiliation of correlative cosmology with philosophical schools other than *Yin-Yang jia*, such as Confucianism. Pang Pu, based on his study of the Mawangdui “*Wuxing*” manuscript, argues against the predominant assumption that Zou Yan or the school of naturalists founded *Wuxing* thought. He finds that the term *Wuxing* in this early Han document referred to the five moral values of Confucianism, namely benevolence, wisdom, rightness, ritual, and sagehood. He further suggests that this same conception of *Wuxing* was the one used by Zi Si and Mencius and criticized by Xunzi.³⁸ Li Xueqin

³⁶ Sivin, “Ruminations on the Tao,” 25; “The Myth of the Naturalists,” 7.

³⁷ Unfortunately, from the late 1980s, more and more of the textual sources in museums and private collections have come from dubious sources, such as tomb robbery.

³⁸ Pang Pu 龐樸, “Mawangdui boshu jiekai le Si Meng Wuxing zhi mi 馬王堆帛書解開了思孟五行之迷,” in Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館, ed., *Mawangdui Hanmu yanjiu* 馬王堆漢墓研究 (Changsha: Hunan Renmin chubanshe, 1981), 119–32; *Lang you ji: Zhongguo wenhua yu zhixue lunji* 根莖集: 中國文化與哲學論 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1988), 427–49.

and others further use the more recent discovery of Chu bamboo strips from Guodian to confirm this early affiliation of *Wuxing* with Confucianism, with an established date as early as the late-middle Warring States (350–300 B.C.).³⁹ Li supports this argument by identifying the Zi Si-Mencius school as one of the eight schools within the Confucian tradition and the one responsible for the teaching of *Wuxing*.⁴⁰ And it is in keeping with this line of argument that Sivin firmly asserts that correlative cosmology was invented in the philosophical tradition and later borrowed by the technicians, not the reverse.

Yet other historians who have dedicated decades of research to newly discovered technical texts can now provide another picture of early China. Donald Harper, based on his extended study of early medical and technical texts, elects to support Graham's argument that correlative cosmology originated from the technical tradition of the Warring States period. To support this argument, Harper finds it necessary to revise the basic analytical categories commonly used. He uses "natural philosophy and occult thought," as a heuristic device, to classify the technical tradition. This concept differs from Needham's "school of Naturalists" in that it embraces both the rationalization of nature and the magical and religious traditions in one, rather than setting them in opposition. Harper uses it because, as he states, in the native Chinese categories defining the technical tradition (*Shushu* and *Fangji*), the two tendencies are undivided and not perceived as opposite categories, unlike the exclusive categories of science, religion, and magic in the conventional paradigm of the history of science.⁴¹

Although he questions the conventional analytical categories, Harper firmly maintains the division between philosophy and the technical tradition in defining his new concept of "natural philosophy and occult thought." He distinguishes the two according to their different concerns and the objects of study; while the masters of philosophy were concerned primarily with individuals, society, the state, and world harmony, the experts in natural philosophy took nature as their primary object of investigation and thus developed theories to rationalize nature and explain phenomena in terms of perceived regularities in the operation of nature itself. Based on this distinction, Harper criticizes the history of philosophy for looking at early China mainly through the lens of the masters of philosophy, whose seemingly humanistic outlook obscures the magico-religious and naturalistic points of view of the occultists and natural experts. He proposes "more integrated studies" of early China's intellectual landscape that sets the two traditions together, with the evidence of the cross-fertilization between the two traditions.⁴²

Moving further in the same direction, Li Ling has conducted the most comprehensive study of the technical tradition of early China. Using Han bibliographical

³⁹ Jingmenshi bowuguan, *Guodian Chumu zhujian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1998), 29–36, 147–54. See also Li Xueqin, "Jingmen Guodian Chujian zhong de Zi Si zi", *Wenwu tiandi* 2 (1998).

⁴⁰ Li Xueqin, "Jingmen Guodian Chujian", 28–30; Li Xueqin, "The Confucian Texts from Guodian Tomb Number One: Their Date and Significance," in Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams, eds., *The Guodian Laozi: Proceedings of the International Conference* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 2000), 108–9.

⁴¹ Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 8–11; "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought," in Michael Loewe et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 813–5.

⁴² Harper, *ibid.*

classification, Li categorizes the technical traditions into systems of “*Shushu*,” which concerns the macrocosm (*Tian dao* 天道), and “*Fangji*,” which concerns the microcosm (*xing ming* 性命). Drawing on abundant new sources to support this reconstruction, Li too challenges the portrayal of Chinese culture as Confucian and purely “humanistic.” He uncovers a “practical culture,” and sets out to rewrite the history of what he calls the “Chinese Axial Age.”⁴³ Inspired by K. C. Chang’s hypothesis of the two origins of world civilizations, Li reexamines the early history of Chinese official institutions and concludes that Chinese civilization has two basic streams; one is the well known philosophical tradition which was later dominated by official Confucianism, and the other is the forgotten and obscured practical tradition. The latter existed before and beneath the former, serving as the fertile background for the flourishing of the hundred philosophical schools in the Axial Age. The roots of the practical tradition extended back to primitive thinking, then found its philosophical expression in *Yin-Yang jia* and Daoism, becoming the foundation for popular and Daoist religions that have continued to the present.

This search for the technical and practical traditions is greatly revealing for our understanding of early China. A much richer and complex picture of early China is emerging from this research, challenging the old tale of a Confucian, humanistic Chinese culture and rewriting the history of the period. The questions of interaction, divergence, contention, and reciprocity of multiple trends of thought are now raised, in place of the old question of a unique homogeneous Chinese mind. Moreover, the analytical categories in both Harper’s and Li’s studies have been designed to coincide, as closely as possible, with ancient Chinese categories rather than with modern Western concepts, representing a great departure from the Western-centered paradigm.

Nevertheless, the basic division of the two traditions, philosophical versus practical, still requires more scrutiny. For Harper, the distinction lies in the different concerns of the two groups of people—the philosophers’ concern for the human world versus the technicians’ concern for the natural world. But whether the philosophers and the technical experts had such deviating concerns is still debatable. It is precisely at this point that Sivin argues that the ultimate aim of correlative cosmology was not objective, rigorous, and verifiable description of the external world, but order and control in the sphere of state and society. And the cosmological understanding of nature was devised only to further that aim.⁴⁴ As for Zou Yan—the representative “Naturalist” according to Needham and the technical expert (*Fangshi* 方士) according to Graham—his concern was not that different from the “philosophers” of his own time; his quest began not with observations of nature but with human institutions and the natural resources that support them. Not only did Zou Yan design a philosophy for political reform, but the theory was actually put into political use by the First Emperor.⁴⁵ The same can be said about the earlier technical professionals such as the Physician He from Qin, who discussed the six types of *qi* 氣 in Heaven that correlate tastes, colors, sounds, and illnesses, and whose primary concern was

⁴³ Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao* (Beijing: Renmin Zhongguo chubanshe, 1993), 2–18.

⁴⁴ Sivin, “Ruminations on the Tao,” 26.

⁴⁵ Sivin, “The Myth of the Naturalists,” 14, 17. See also Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture*, 139–42.

reprimanding a ruler for his misconduct.⁴⁶ Judging from these cases, the concerns of the “philosophers” and “technicians” were not always that distinct, and thus the classification of the two traditions and two groups of people based on this single criterion becomes questionable.

Using Chinese native categories is not necessarily free from difficulties, either. For Li Ling, the two traditions of the philosophical (masters of philosophy) and the practical (*fangshu* 方術) are purely Chinese categories. He consciously abandons modern Western analytical categories by reconstructing the ancient Chinese system of knowledge. His reconstruction shows a comprehensive and flourishing world of practice that no study of intellectual history has ever revealed. While Li Ling’s categories are extremely useful for his purpose of reconstructing textual traditions, they too become problematic when transferred to intellectual or social history. Many scholars, including myself, prefer these Chinese categories to modern Western ones such as religion or philosophy. Yet we cannot forget that these Chinese categories were derived from Han bibliographical classification, which was retrospectively applied to earlier texts based on their genre, style, and text types rather than on the texts’ content or social groupings of people. For example, the texts on *Yin-yang* and *Wuxing* cosmology are spread among nearly all of the six bibliographical categories in *Hanshu*. The basis for these classifications was not so much their conceptual systems, since they all employed *Yin-yang* or *Wuxing* systems, but rather their textual features. Li Ling quotes earlier analyses to state that the texts listed under *Yin-yang jia* within the category “Masters of Philosophy” and under *Wuxing* within “Numerological Arts” share common conceptual schemes—*Yin-yang* and Five Phases—and they share a common scholarly origin. The difference between them lies mostly in authorship; those classified under “Masters of Philosophy” have the master’s name in the title (with one exception), while most of those classified under “Numerological Arts” lack such a name.⁴⁸

Actually, crucial analytical categories of Chinese studies often derive from these bibliographical classifications. The division between philosophy and technical traditions coincides with the bibliographical division between “Masters of Philosophy” and both “Numerological Arts” and “Recipes and Techniques.” The divisions among the “schools” of philosophy also derive from the Han bibliography.⁴⁹ Scholars tend to abstract from these bibliographical categories some prototypes of schools or traditions, such as attributing the five virtues to Confucianism, *Yin-yang* to *Yin-yang jia*, or the concern for nature to naturalist philosophy. In a case of cyclical reasoning, scholars then use these prototypes to judge whether a text or a person belonged to a certain school or tradition.

But the direct conversion of bibliographical categories into analytical categories is problematic, because concepts were often shared by different traditions, people were by no means fixed by coherent groups, and ideas were fluid, traveling across textual genres. Many unresolved questions have more to do with handicaps of the analytical categories used than with a lack of data. One such question is whether Zou Yan was a Confucian (since he was concerned with the virtues of rulers), a

⁴⁶ *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 1.8; Graham, *Yin-Yang*, 71.

⁴⁸ Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 15; *Zhongguo fangshu xukao* (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2000), 87.

⁴⁹ See Sivin, “Ruminations on the Tao,” 27, and footnote 13.

naturalist philosopher (since he employed the cosmological concept of Five Powers, *Wude* 五德), or a technical practitioner (since philosophers of his time paid no attention to him). Other such questions include the demarcation of the school of Huang Lao, and whether a text like *Huainanzi* belongs to Confucianism, Daoism, or the Huang Lao school.⁵⁰ In a word, when one adopts the Han classification of the philosophical tradition (*zhuzi*) versus the technical (*fangshu*), one needs to ask whether the classification of texts can readily be used to classify people from different professions, to classify thought that had different conceptual schemes (humanist versus naturalist), or to classify different social functions of knowledge (ideological versus practical).

Harper's and Li's analytical categories exemplify the achievements as well as the difficulties involved in renewing the analytical tools of Chinese studies. The direction of their research, however, parallels developments in general social science theory.

IV. Practice, Hegemony, and Embodiment

Since the 1970s, a fascinating parallel has developed across disciplines. When Chinese archaeologists provided the first body of evidence that diverted the study of Chinese cosmology from philosophy to practice and from the mind to the body (medicine, sexual arts, etc.), theoretical models in anthropology and the social sciences in general also shifted from structuralist universalism to a concern for practice, techniques, agency, embodiment, and everyday social life. The attacks on structuralism shift the foundation upon which most study of Chinese cosmology has been built.

Structuralism has been the dominating paradigm for the study of Chinese correlative cosmology, which expanded the study of cosmology beyond philosophy by providing it a structural connection to social systems. But its universalism and holistic view of cosmology were achieved at the price of history. Cosmology, as a structure of the mind, was described as static and permanent, transcending history and the activities of human agency. Furthermore, the holistic connection of cosmology to the social was framed in terms of a fundamental dichotomy, the dichotomy that is still visible in the model of the dual traditions of Chinese civilization mentioned above, and in the continuing divisions between theory and practice and between mind and body.

This paradigm was under serious challenge, first from anthropology and sociology. The "practice approach" developed separately by Marshall Sahlins and Pierre Bourdieu represents one such challenge. This approach attempts to overcome the deep ahistorical tendency of structuralism by implicitly uniting history and structure. It introduces to the analysis of structures—whether economic, political, or symbolic—the concepts of human agents, events, and actions, all constrained by, yet at the same time reproducing and transforming, the structure itself.⁵¹ Sahlins claims

⁵⁰ Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture*, 182–5, 191, 193.

⁵¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981).

that any symbolic structure is historical in nature: "‘Structure’—the symbolic relations of cultural order—is an historical object."⁵² The practical approach has been greatly influential; its key concepts, such as "practice," "agency," "events," "time," "process," and "change," have become part of the mainstream analytical vocabulary of anthropology. The greatest contribution of this approach is to introduce the active role of people in altering any given structure through their everyday practice, thus shifting analytical attention from the static structure to active agency and the dynamism of practice. Criticisms of this approach have been concentrated mainly on its incompleteness in its departure from structuralism.⁵³ To overcome such incompleteness, other anthropologists have undertaken long-term histories in an attempt to uncover the internal dynamics and systematic changes of structure.⁵⁴

Neo-Marxism further broke down the most basic categories of structuralism—the cultural and the socio-political—by integrating the concept of culture with the classical Marxist concept of ideology, and consequently changing both. Marx and Engels established that ideology is a system of beliefs produced by the dominant class, which functions to sustain and legitimate relations of economic domination.⁵⁵ Breaking away from this economic determinism, Neo-Marxists have incorporated cultural phenomena in their analysis. They thus significantly extend the concept of ideology far beyond the boundaries of "beliefs" and "consciousness," and beyond the immediate economic interests of the dominant class. For example, Antonio Gramsci broadens the scope of ideology from economic exploitation to the political leadership, symbolic production, and cultural domination of the ruling class, conceptualizing such domination in terms of "hegemony." He insists that controlling material production alone cannot establish class domination; the ruling group must also take leadership in the production of culture.⁵⁶ Some anthropologists have expanded the concept of ideological dominance from a system of ideas to everyday symbolic existence at every level of society, incorporating symbolic systems, classification, symbolic acts, subconsciousness, common sense, language, gestures, and aesthetic taste and style into the analysis of relations of domination. Such study has totally redefined the concepts of both culture and politics, conceiving them as deeply embedded within each other.⁵⁷ Advancing from his earlier model of the practice approach, Bourdieu

⁵² Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), vii.

⁵³ See Sally F. Moore, ed. *Moralizing States and the Ethnography of the Present* (American Ethnological Society Monograph Series 5, 1993), 9, 328.

⁵⁴ Stanley Tambiah traces the roots of the contemporary political system in Thailand to early Buddhism, uncovering "a recurrence of structures and their transformations in systematic terms," and "dynamics of polities" behind the cosmology and doctrine. Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Religion and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 5, 123. More recent examples are works by Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), and Talal Asad, *Genealogy of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁵⁵ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart), 1965, 61; *Selected Works*, (Moscow, 1958), vol. 1, 363.

⁵⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

⁵⁷ For example, the Comaroffs raise the question of how culture constructs and is constructed by ideology and thus is involved in power relations. See John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "The Madman and the Migrant: Work and Labor in the Historical Consciousness of a South African People," *American Ethnologist* 14.2 (1987), 191–209; *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); also Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985).

examines the production of symbolic systems which works underneath consciousness and functions to reproduce the structure of social order, terming this kind of symbolic dominance “habitus.”⁵⁸ Others have gone further to change the model of a single, unitary, and homogeneous structure of dominance, proposing that culture is a dynamic field of struggle and resistance. Representative works include Dick Hebdige’s study of “subculture,”⁵⁹ and James Scott’s formulation of everyday peasant resistance as “weapons of the weak.”⁶⁰

The total rejection of structuralism and its universalism has come from post-modern theory. It erases the final distinction between culture and power and perceives them as an integrated whole. It also proposes a multiplicity of different histories and local narratives that are incapable of being summarized or unified in one all-encompassing narrative.⁶¹ Michel Foucault’s projects—his studies of the social institutions of the prison and the hospital, the discourse of the science of man, and knowledge, power, and body—have a continuous theme, which concerns how (Western) *culture* attempts to normalize individuals into meaningful subjects and obedient objects of modern society. In his theory, power and knowledge are intrinsically intertwined.⁶² The body, rather than mind, is the site for subjectification and embodied practice, and thus the object of power (in forms of “bio-power”).⁶³ Similarly, Jean Baudrillard argues against economic theories such as Marxism, asserting that *culture* and the processes of representation have gained primacy over the economic “bases” in contemporary society.⁶⁴ Frederic Jameson describes how late capitalist expansion and domination is achieved through the integration of cultural and economic systems and through the expansion of culture in every aspect of social life, ranging from the economy and state power to everyday practical life and even the structure of the psyche. He terms this form of power “cultural dominance,” or the “cultural logic” of late capitalism.⁶⁵

The theoretical conception of culture in Neo-Marxism and postmodernism has departed completely from the positive, clearly demarcated concept of culture in structuralism. It has greatly changed the paradigm that has dominated the study of Chinese cosmology since the time of Durkheim. The very concept of “culture” has been fundamentally altered, from a static structure of customs or symbols to a dynamic system that changes in social practice. Cosmology, as a cultural form, can no longer be seen as a pure structure of mind transcending history and neutral to power, but rather has to be studied as an integral part of the ideology, dominance, and power relations of a dynamically changing society. The new concepts of power and culture, while developed to describe the postmodern condition, have completely transfig-

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 170, 463–71.

⁵⁹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Methuen), 1979.

⁶⁰ James C. Scott, *The Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), xv–xvii, 304–50.

⁶¹ Michael Payne, *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1996), 429.

⁶² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

⁶³ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xvii–xxvii, 133–34.

⁶⁴ Payne, *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, 429.

⁶⁵ Frederic Jameson, *Post-Modernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). Payne, *ibid.*, 430.

ured the most basic analytical concepts of the humanities and social sciences in general and of the study of Chinese cosmology in particular. Consequently, no fields of inquiry can be totally isolated or immune from this change of analytical concepts, including its insights and flaws alike, not even a field so remote from the postmodern as correlative cosmology in early China.

V. Cosmology: from mind to body, and from hegemony to contestation

While social science theory has departed from structuralism and transformed the analytical vocabulary, Chinese studies has also changed its relationship with theory. In the days of Granet, the universal structuralism of Durkheimian sociology could be directly applied to study different cultural types, China being one of them. Today, the communication between Chinese studies and Neo-Marxism and postmodernism has taken a more indirect form. When these theories denounced universalism, Chinese studies reduced its direct borrowing from or dialogue with them. However, an indirect or partial engagement remains, and a parallel orientation between the two is evident. I have described parallel developments in the study of Chinese cosmology and in social science theory; both have moved away from structures of mind or articulated theories towards practice, techniques, the body, and everyday social life. This has been more of a parallel rather than an open dialogue; communication between the two is limited and unarticulated, achieved mostly through the filter of common intellectual language and orientation, which have changed greatly from the day of Granet.

Even without a direct, consciously engaged dialogue, however, the study of correlative cosmology is directly relevant to the development of general theory in the social sciences and humanities. The study of early China not only requires the use of shared analytical vocabulary, it is also capable of critiquing and modifying existing theory. For example, the rediscovery of the practical and technical traditions challenges the perception of a homogeneous Confucian *culture*; and the shift of scholarly attention from the mind to everyday social life questions a hegemonic *power* and perceives the multivalency of *cosmology*.

More scholars are now further exploring the relationship between the technical and philosophical traditions of Chinese culture. In the twilight zone between the two, across the blurred boundaries of typology, the entangled interactions between thought and practice and the intertwined struggle among divergent historical agencies have arisen to become novel focuses of scholarship. More attention is now being paid to the body beneath the mind, to the symbolic, practical, and everyday social life lying beneath philosophical rationalization.

Robin Yates' study of Qin bureaucracy is a good example of the new research on this scholarly frontier. In light of the cosmological material discovered at *Shuihudi* 睡虎地, Yates moves away from traditional institutional history, which is confined to the formal political structure, to focus on the state's techniques, practice, and symbolic control. While quoting Granet's insightful description of Chinese cosmology, Yates proceeds to assert that cosmological concepts—time, space, body, and correlations built on *Yin-Yang* and *Wuxing*, as well as language itself—were not merely

describing the order of the universe, but rather the very means of creating that order and constructing the world. The conceptualization of time, space, and body was not just of theoretical importance to scholars, but was also "one of the main political, economic and culturally significant and symbolic acts of government." As the symbolic foundation of the Qin state and bureaucracy, cosmology formed a tightly integrated symbolic structure which seemed to express the very nature of the cosmos itself. Cosmology functioned as a powerful discourse appearing to be self-evident and true, and "through which both intellectuals and people spoke and thought." Furthermore, the Qin state used cosmology to define spatial, corporal, and temporal boundaries in order to regulate and control the actual daily practice of administration, in which all members of society participated, from the ruler down to the least of his subjects.⁶⁶ In particular, Yates describes how the techniques, administrative practices, and mechanisms of control in the Qin bureaucratic system were embedded within the cosmological framework. With this description, Yates negates the interpretation of the Qin state as a modern "rational-legal," Weberian-style bureaucracy, and argues that the Qin bureaucracy was closely linked to the cosmological or to the divine.⁶⁷

With a very similar interest, Nathan Sivin also sets out to examine the explicit connections between the cosmos, the body, and the state in early China. Taking a novel perspective, he considers the three a single complex rather than studying them as distinct entities compartmentalized into philosophy, medicine, and political institutions. He describes how the use of omens as warnings to rulers motivated the study of the cosmos, from which evolved both astrology and mathematical astronomy. At the same time, the concept of the body evolved from an assemblage of functions to a microcosm. The macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the body resonate in harmony to form a unified cosmology, in which the correspondence between nature, state, and body is established and the emperor becomes the embodied link between them.⁶⁸

Both Yates and Sivin are concerned with the mutuality of state and cosmology, treating them as a single, mutually constructive process. While Yates concentrates on how state power is embedded in cosmology and embodied in practice, Sivin stresses the political motivation behind the evolution of cosmology and the ideological function of it. This attention to the body and the symbolic aspect of state power not only coincides with the direction of theoretical development just described, but also advances it by breaking through the limitations of existing theoretical concepts. The integration of power and culture, the discipline and normalization of the body, and the cultural forms of dominance can no longer be seen as uniquely modern and post-modern phenomena.

In my own work on cosmology, I have similarly tried to investigate the connection of cosmology to the state in early China. While Yates and Sivin focus on the

⁶⁶ Robin D. S. Yates, "Body, Space, Time and Bureaucracy: Boundary Creation and Control Mechanisms in Early China," in John Hay, ed., *Boundaries in China* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 61–2, 66, 79–80.

⁶⁷ Robin D. S. Yates, "The Yin-Yang Texts from Yinqueshan: An Introduction and Partial Reconstruction, with Notes on Their Significance in Relation to Huang-Lao Daoism," *Early China* 19 (1994), 333, 364–6.

⁶⁸ Nathan Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body."

constructive role of cosmology in building and justifying the state, I look for the contestation, argument, and conflict within cosmology in the process of empire formation. Investigating the mutual construction of cosmology and the imperial state, I have been particularly interested in the discrepancies, contradictions, and conflicts embedded in the seemingly highly unified and homogeneous cosmology. My research reveals that in the empires of Qin and Han, cosmology did not simply justify the existing political power, but rather embodied tensions of imperial formation among competing social forces—tensions over the transmission of power, social-political order, and imperial sovereignty. Such tensions unfolded in symbolic struggles—between the cosmic cycles of conquest and nurturing—that in turn completely transformed cosmology as well as the concept of imperial sovereignty. Specifically, the practice of Han omen interpretation illustrates the symbolic contests among opposing political forces that were carried out within the shared cosmological discourse, and such practice formed and transformed the cardinal imperial institution, emperorship. As exemplified by the discursive opposition between Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 and the King of Huainan, cosmological resonance between Heaven and Earth provided a shared structure and common vocabulary for political contest. Through such contest, emperorship was symbolically constructed not as the sole source of power, but rather as the axis of the cosmos and pivot of empire, connecting Heaven above and Earth below, and linking the vast web of social and political relations around him. As such a pivot, emperorship divided, mediated, and embraced the infinite oppositions in both the cosmos and the human world into a complex hierarchy of unequal relations and a vibrant field of interactions; these oppositions include Heaven versus Man, *Yin* versus *Yang*, private versus public, the civil versus the militant, the technical experts versus scholars, inner court versus outer court, the ruler versus the subject, etc.⁶⁹

In exploring early China's correlative cosmology, I have made a conscious attempt to resume a direct dialogue between Chinese studies and social theory. My particular theoretical proposal is an alternative model of analysis: a model that substitutes infinite oppositions constituting power relations for homogeneous "hegemony," an essentialized "power," or a dichotomy of domination/resistance; a model that breaks away from either cultural or social determinism, exploring both the cultural construction of power and the social agent's active manipulation and change of cultural discourse in the same historical process; a model that locates the mechanism of change in fluid socio-political groups and forces, rather than in a totalizing state or the generic individual.

⁶⁹ Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture*.

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Cosmological Systems as Sources of Art, Ornament and Design

by
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Introduction

This paper will address links between the philosophical notions generally called correlative cosmology and artefacts and paintings, especially those found in tombs. Other papers in this volume are concerned with the subject matter of correlative cosmology and new research in this area. The present paper reviews the ways in which certain new understandings of philosophical issues can contribute to an enhanced appreciation of the importance in early China of physical presentations of the cosmos.

Hitherto, early Chinese material culture, above all those aspects explored in this essay—ritual vessels, tombs and the renowned painting traditions of mountains and birds and flowers—has frequently been considered independently of contemporary philosophies.¹ This material evidence has, therefore, been ignored as a source of understanding of intellectual and religious ideas.² In addition, these diverse materials have been generally considered one by one, and their several developments over time have not been integrated.

In particular, changes in ancient Chinese material culture have only rarely been explored as evidence of major discontinuities in thought and belief. Yet, major innovations in ritual vessels and tomb structure and decoration, all of which were significant adjuncts to ancient Chinese religious activities, are likely to have followed upon the introduction of new religious beliefs and practices. The first point to be made by the paper is, therefore, that the choice of new vessel categories and new tomb types in the third century BC should be examined in the light of significant changes in philosophical concepts, most especially the emergence of correlative cosmology.³

¹ The use of the terms China and Chinese are not particularly appropriate with reference to the pre-Han period. In the present discussion, the terms refer to those areas where the dominate élite written language was Chinese.

² A pioneering article that exploits textual material from tombs and refers tangentially to artefacts is by Anna Seidel, "Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts Found in Tombs," Akitsuki Kan'ei, ed., *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka* (Tokyo, 1987), 21–57.

³ The various strands contributing to correlative cosmology are more fully discussed in the introduction to the volume and by other authors here.

The cosmos at the centre of the present discussion was maintained by the *dao* 道 (the principle of the universe), and given energy and change by the forces of *qi* 氣 (literally, breath or air, but seen as energy), *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, and the five phases or elements, wood, metal, fire, water and earth, whose alternation allowed transformation and change. Essential to the present account is the view that the universe was not created nor made active by spirits and deities, nor were such forces as *yin* and *yang* ever thought of as personified deities.⁴ For that reason, I shall generally use the term systematic cosmos to embrace beliefs about a geometrically organised space-time structure that had the following principal features: the heavenly bodies, the mountains and rivers and the four seasons and the myriad things, especially the animals, birds and plants. This cosmos was a unified and integrated whole. All parts were linked, and if one part was affected, for example by changes in the seasons, then other correlated features would “respond” (*ying* 應) to this change, and be equally affected also.

If we pursue the hypothesis that intellectual and material changes occurring simultaneously during the third century BC were connected, then we should consider the new ritual vessel types and the new decoration of tombs in terms of the development of a new understanding of the universe. Indeed, from the second century BC, the subject matter of tomb decoration can be shown to derive from the major features of the cosmos. Out of this observation emerges the principal thesis of the paper, namely that the primary art and ornamental systems of China from the Han (206 BC – AD 220) down to the modern period rested upon a shared understanding of the cosmos, namely that of correlative cosmology.

This paper, therefore, argues that what are normally treated as separate artistic and ornamental genres—landscape painting, bird and flower painting, dragon robes and flower scrolls on architecture and porcelain—can be better understood as aspects of a single integrated system of visual signs intimately related to a system of ideas about the cosmos. Indeed, as all parts of this universe were thought to be correlated, such integration is only to be expected. But equally strong integration is to be found in the visual systems of the ancient and medieval Mediterranean worlds, as we shall see.⁵

The paper will, primarily, be based upon a discussion of material from tombs. However reference will also be made to texts of the sixth to twelfth centuries AD that describe paintings, generally now lost. These texts mention the subject matter of paintings extensively and, in some cases, the supposed effects of these paintings. For an aspect of the present discussion is the view that decoration of tombs and buildings was intended to achieve certain effects or outcomes. The paper will also, therefore, touch upon the uses of images.

⁴ Michael Puett describes attempts in the Warring States period to attribute the origins of the cosmos to a deity or spirit, see his *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 160–70. The notion that the world came into existence as a result of transmogrification of the body of Pan Gu post-dates the development of correlative cosmology and never had a profound impact of the overarching structure described here. For summaries of different origins of ancient “creation” stories, see Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction* (Baltimore and London, 1993), 29–33.

⁵ A hypothesis, not further explored here, is that the visual systems of all cultures are intimately related to their assumptions about the universe and are thus joined with their religious and philosophical notions.



Section 1 will show how the changes in notions of the cosmos fit with the changes observed in tombs and ritual vessels. Section 2, Theories of the Cosmos and the Role of Images, will suggest, through a comparison with the Mediterranean world, some reasons why we can expect artefacts, paintings and intellectual ideas to be linked, and will also through such a comparison draw attention to the very special features of the Chinese view of the cosmos. In this context the Western notion of the image as a mere replica of a primary original will be reviewed. Section 3 will show how notions about the cosmos fit with what is observed in tombs and with textual references to the subject matter of wall, screen and scroll paintings under the headings of: The shape of the universe; The Heavens; The Earth—the mountains and rivers, and the four seasons; and the conjunctions between human life and the cosmos, the area that is often termed correlative cosmology. Here some of the analogies and metaphors with which we are familiar from Chinese poetry as well from painting, founded upon the correlation of parts of the universe with one another, will be discussed.

Section 4 will show how representation of auspicious omens meshes with the view that in a universe which is an integrated whole all phenomena indicate some aspect of Heaven's responses and all phenomena have to be minutely observed. The paper argues that good omens or portents were depicted to create auspicious spaces.

1. The Offerings to the Ancestors and the Development of a New Cosmology

As changes in notions about the cosmos are relevant issues, it is necessary first to outline views of the universe and of the supernatural prior to the third century BC. David Keightley and Michael Puett, working, in part, with oracle bone texts and bronze inscriptions dating from c. 1200 BC and later, argue that the Shang (c. 1300–c.1050), ruling in the central Yellow River area at that time, envisaged a universe in which deities, *di* 帝, had power over events in the world.⁶ They could affect the lives of people. Numerous deities existed, from the great Shangdi 上帝, to *di* 帝 and lesser spirits, *shen* 神, associated with mountains and rivers, with winds and directions. Ancestors were, apparently, intermediaries between the human world and the gods and spirits. Fine bronze vessels and inscriptions in them fit the generally accepted view that banquets offered in complex rites were motivated by the wish of the Shang and Zhou élites to ensure that their ancestors fulfilled their appropriate roles, to ensure the goodwill of various deities and spirits for their descendants.

The views of the Shang and Zhou (c. 1050–771 BC) differed in one significant respect. The Zhou who conquered the Shang in c. 1050 turned their attention to *tian* 天, or Heaven, as the principal supernatural force. In other ways, the Zhou continued the Shang system of ancestral rites and sought the intervention of ancestors on their

⁶ I have given rather conservative dates, referring primarily to the period for which there are written records. David Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China (ca.1200–1045 B.C.)* (Berkeley, 2000); "Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors: Religious Mediation in Neolithic and Shang China (ca. 5000–1000 B.C.)," *Asiatische Studien* 52.3 (1998): 763–831; "The Religious Commitment: Shang Theology and the Genesis of Chinese Political Culture," *History of Religions* 17.3/4 (Feb-May 1978): 211–25; Puett, *To Become a God*, 40–54.

behalf. Deities and spirits remained ubiquitous features of their universe also.⁷ We know from the *Shijing* 詩經 (the *Book of Poetry*), the earliest compilation of Chinese poetry, parts of which date to around 600 BC, that spirits were to be attracted to partake of the banquets.⁸ Donald Harper, Aihe Wang and Michael Puett have described very significant, and sometimes conflicting, changes in the understanding of the supernatural during the Warring States period, and the many differing perspectives that contributed to these new views.⁹ Mark Lewis has presented a context of social change that may account for some of the new perspectives.¹⁰

Two salient preoccupations seem to have emerged.¹¹ The first was a concern with the generation and control of the cosmos by deities and spirits, especially the One, or *Taiyi* 太一, and with the relative roles of humans and spirits in exerting power over the forces of the cosmos.¹² The second was a growing emphasis on a systematic cosmos.¹³ In the debates of the fourth to first centuries BC, the ancestors as powers receded and the roles of human sovereigns, sages and spirits were weighed against each other.¹⁴ However, even as these debates exercised major thinkers, notions of a systematic cosmos were accepted as fundamental to the discussion.¹⁵

Although the systematic cosmos was to emerge as the dominant theory, if we are to appreciate the many functions of ancient tombs, we need to explore a little further this preoccupation with spirits. Two categories of being, *shen* 神, spirit, and *xian* 仙, immortal, are relevant. Some thought that it was possible for a person to

⁷ Puett, *To Become a God*, 54–79.

⁸ Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (London, 1937), 207–11.

⁹ Puett, *To Become a God*, chapter 2 and following; Donald Harper “Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought,” in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China, From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, 813–84; Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge, 2000).

¹⁰ Mark Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany, 1990).

¹¹ In addition to sources mentioned above, see Sarah Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn Annals, according to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge, 1996); John Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York, 1984); A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Illinois, 1989), pt. 4; John S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi* (Albany, 1993); Donald Harper, “Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought,” in Loewe and Shaughnessy, *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, 813–84; Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge, 2000).

¹² Recent discoveries of texts at Guodian have thrown important light on the role of *Taiyi*; see Puett, *To Become a God*, 160–61.

¹³ Other types of evidence demonstrate the co-existence of notions about spirits with those of a systematic cosmos as seen in the recently excavated documents found in Warring States and Han tombs that provide calendrical information in daybooks, see Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany, 1998), 84–92.

¹⁴ It seems possible that the growing interactions between different areas of the Chinese landmass gave additional prominence to spirits who were not the ancestors of the ruling élite. It may therefore have seemed necessary to consider how these spirits could be accommodated in a perspective of the universe. See for examples discussions of *Taiyi*, Li Ling, “An Archaeological Study of *Taiyi* (Grand One) Worship,” *Early Medieval China* 2 (1995–96): 1–39. Recent archaeological evidence cited by Li Ling appears to indicate that *Taiyi* was a deity popular in southern China, who became assimilated by the court into the official system of star deities.

¹⁵ The debate itself indicates that many concepts were shared. The view that it was possible that the spirits might control the cosmos carried with it the suggestion that they might not. Hence the systematic cosmos seems to have been fundamental to the discussion. See also discussion in Nathan Sivin, “The Myth of the Naturalists” in *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), section 4.

refine their *qi* and become a spirit by following particular diets and other practices. Two early histories, the *Shiji* 史記 by Sima Qian (active c. 145–c. 86 BC) and the *Hanshu* 漢書 by Ban Gu (AD 32–92), describe the numerous spirits that were incorporated in court ceremonies.¹⁶ The places or sites where the spirits might be encountered were expressed in topographical terms. They dominated mountains and rivers for example. The geographical text, the *Shanhaijing* 山海經, describes many regions in terms of the strange and supernatural creatures that inhabited them. In addition, two particular areas became directly associated with spirits, namely Kunlun 崑崙 in the west and the Islands of the Immortals in the eastern sea.¹⁷ We also have evidence of the hold that these ideas had on the time from the records of the obsessions of the First Emperor of Qin (221–210 BC) and of Han Wudi 漢武帝 (141–87 BC) with their searches for recipes for “non-death.”¹⁸ By achieving non-death, a person hoped to become a spirit, or, in slightly later terminology, an immortal.

But, while deities and spirits remained a constant interest in all succeeding periods, by the first century BC, they were no longer thought to control the cosmos. The *dao*, *qi*, *yin* and *yang* were widely acknowledged as the primary components, with the five phases ensuring change and alternation.¹⁹

This new perspective coincided with very visible changes in ritual vessel types and in tomb structures. By the early Han dynasty (second to first century BC), the traditional bronze categories, inherited from the Shang and the Zhou, seem to have given way to lacquers in ritual contexts.²⁰ Over two centuries, the following trends can be observed. Bronze was less and less frequently employed for the classic ritual vessel types, such as *ding* 鼎, *gui* 簋, and *dou* 豆. Such a shift suggests that ancient ceremonies using traditional vessels, originally made in bronze, were no longer current.²¹ New categories now made in bronze, such as incense burners, may, for example, have been connected with ceremonies to contact spirits and immortals, as the hill censers of the later Western Han seem to have depicted the islands of the eastern seas, on which immortals were thought to live.²² Inscriptions on mirrors, which were also made of bronze, speak of the life of immortals.²³

¹⁶ Burton Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian of China Translated from the Shih chi of Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 2 vols. (New York and London, 1961), vol. 2, 28–31; Ban Gu, *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1970), “Jiaosi zhi,” *juan* 25.

¹⁷ On Kunlun the *Huainanzi* is an important source, see Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 150–61. It seems likely that an interest in Penglai was derived from local concerns in Shandong and was then adopted in the Chinese-speaking world more widely, see Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 2, 39.

¹⁸ Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 2, 13–69 is the chapter on the Feng and Shan sacrifices; see also Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty* (Hong Kong and New York, 1993), 35–83 which gives the biography of the First Emperor of Qin.

¹⁹ The terms and views are common to most of the surviving so-called classics such as the *Yi jing*, the *Zuozhuan*, the writings of *Xunzi* and *Guanzi* and in Qin and Han period texts, such as the *Lüshi chunqiu*, the *Huainanzi*, the *Baibutong* and the writings of Dong Zhongshu in the *Chunqiu fanlu*. Note, however, that *wu xing* in *Xunzi* most probably refers to the five modes of virtuous conduct.

²⁰ Jessica Rawson, “Ritual Vessel Changes in the Warring States, Qin and Han Periods” in *Regional Culture, Religion and Arts before the Seventh Century, Papers from the Third International Conference on Sinology, History Section* (Taipei: 2002), 1–56, illustrates the sites and their contents and elaborates on the ideas summarised here.

²¹ In the very highest level of tomb, bronze was also used for rounded cooking vessels employed on stoves, see the tomb of Liu Sheng at Mancheng, *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 2 vols. (Beijing, 1980), vol. 1, 54–58.

²² Susan Erickson, “Boshanlu—Mountain Censers of the Western Han Period: A Typological and Iconological Analysis,” *Archives of Asian Art* 45 (1992): 6–28.

²³ Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London, 1979), 198–201.

At the same time, food and drink were presented in lacquer vessels, most especially the circular *zun* 尊 and *zhi* 卮, lacquer ear-cups and flat platters.²⁴ The choice of lacquer vessels as the main vehicle in which food and wine were offered to the dead has several implications. No longer was ritual display foremost (in life or the afterlife), for the vessels were small and repetitive in form.²⁵ Utilitarian needs for nourishment for the dead seem to have been the predominant objective.²⁶ These lacquer vessels appear in tombs, probably as containers for the food for the afterlife. They were also used for ritual in life; the lower section of the famous Mawangdui banner displays lacquer cups on a table or stand (fig. 1).²⁷

These new vessel categories used for offerings must be seen alongside changes in tomb types. Over much of northern central China, from the Neolithic to the late Warring States period, the major tomb type consisted of a vertical shaft. During the Shang and Zhou periods, the more sumptuous burials had nested coffins one inside the other. These, almost certainly, reflected wealth and status. As the whole was buried deep underground, a possible hypothesis is that such signs of status were addressed to the community of the dead as much as to the living.²⁸ For the only general theory that fits the majority of the tomb provisioning in China from the Neolithic to the present day is that the Chinese have consistently taken the view that the life after death resembles life before it.

Although shaft tombs with nested coffins continued in use into the Han period,²⁹ in some areas, from the late Warring States, coffin structures appear to have been extended to provide separate spaces for different functions in the afterlife, such as cooking or banqueting.³⁰ It seems probable that these types of tomb, which were especially popular in the south, were among the factors that encouraged burial specialists to create the new multi-chambered tombs of the Western Han located in the east, in present-day Shandong, Hebei and eastern Henan.³¹

²⁴ These lacquer forms were reproduced in bronze and jade, see Jessica Rawson, "Ritual Vessel Changes in the Warring States, Qin and Han Periods," 32–33.

²⁵ For references to southern tombs supplied with lacquer vessels in the Western Han, see Margarete Prüch, *Die Lacke der Westlichen Han-Zeit* (206 v.-6 n. Ch.), (Frankfurt, 1997). Some tombs were supplied with pictures rather than actual objects. Both, combined no doubt, with offerings made above ground seemed to guarantee perpetual nourishment.

²⁶ An emphasis on lacquer seems to indicate a tendency to accept Chu fashions and practices and possibly also the products of Sichuan, an area rich in lacquer-producing trees and in workshops. For a discussion of the various regional sources from which the Han took their artefacts, see Jessica Rawson, "The Eternal Palaces of the Western Han: A New View of the Universe," *Artibus Asiae* 59.1/2 (1999), 5–58.

²⁷ Rare examples of scenes of offerings on late Han reliefs from Shandong also depict lacquers, or vessels in other materials made in lacquer forms. These examples are illustrated and discussed in Jessica Rawson, "Ritual Vessel Changes in the Warring States, Qin and Han Periods," see especially figure 3.

²⁸ Texts compiled at a later date, such as the *Liji*, suggest coffin numbers were indicative of status, see James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China. The texts of Confucianism: The Li Ki*. In Max Müller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East*, vols. XXVII–XXVIII, (Oxford, 1885), xxvii, 158–59.

²⁹ See for example tombs at Xi'an, *Xi'an Longshouyuan Hanmu* (Xi'an, 1999).

³⁰ For a discussion of southern tombs see Wu Hung, "The Art and Architecture of the Warring States Period," in Loewe and Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, 651–744.

³¹ In many regions shaft tombs continued in use through the Western Han. The élite, especially the Liu family, seem to have taken up the new tomb form at an early date and to have set a fashion that spread through society. Other contributions to the new design of Han tombs probably came from certain burial types developed in the pre-Imperial Qin state. Lothar von Falkenhausen places special emphasis on the Qin contribution: see "Mortuary Behaviour in Pre-Imperial Qin: A Religious Interpretation," paper presented to the *International Conference on Religion and the Study of Chinese Society: The Transformation of the Field and Its Implications for the Study*

The most sumptuous examples were made for the Imperial princes. These members of the Liu 劉 family ruled as subordinate kings of minor eastern states and were buried in mountains in Shandong, Jiangsu, eastern Henan and Hebei provinces.³² Their rock-cut palaces of the afterlife may have seemed to guarantee an eternal beautifully equipped dwelling that did not decay with time.³³ Present-day Shandong and Jiangsu are also areas rich in Neolithic burials of jades, which, if accidentally discovered, may have provided a source of material for the jade suits used to bury members of the Liu family.³⁴ We know from texts found in tombs that the Chinese thought that bodily decay was caused by demon attacks. The jade suits constructed by analogy with iron armour had an appearance that fits with the notion that they may have been intended as defences against demon attacks on the human body.³⁵

The best known of such burials is that of Liu Sheng 劉勝 (113 BC) at Mancheng 滿城 in Hebei.³⁶ But the Kings of Chu 楚, buried at Xuzhou 徐州 in present-day Jiangsu province, had much larger and, in their day, no doubt more magnificent constructions. The chambers of these tombs were dug horizontally into the mountain-side, providing a group of life-size rooms.³⁷ We also know from fragmentary evidence that the tombs were decorated with pictures and supplied with magnificent treasures from the personal possessions of the kings. Lower down the social hierarchy, in some but not all areas, smaller tombs were similar in plan, if reduced in scale. They were often supplied with pictures and models in place of the possessions of life. In different regions of central China, these tomb types were adapted to local conditions and beliefs.

Texts recovered from tombs also give us some information about possible assumptions made about the afterlife.³⁸ The very provision of large numbers of texts in some tombs probably indicates that their owners intended to use them after death. In addition the content of the texts is revealing. As well as spells and

of *Chinese Culture*, Chinese University of Hong Kong, May 2000 (forthcoming). Falkenhausen places special emphasis on catacomb tombs, which certainly had some impact in eastern China. However, it is by no means clear that they were a major factor in the creation of tombs with separate rooms for different functions. The most significant contributions of Qin to later tombs were the use of granaries and stoves as pottery models, and practices borrowed from areas to the west of the Chinese-speaking world. See also Robert L. Thorp, "The Mortuary Art and Architecture of Early Imperial China" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 1979), 44.

³² Only some of these tombs are published. See especially *Kaogu xuebao* 1997.2, 36–46; *Wenwu* 1988.2, 2–18, 68, *Kaogu* 1986.12, 1–16, *Wenwu* 1998.8: 4–33.

³³ For discussion of and references to these tombs, see Jessica Rawson, "The Eternal Palaces of the Western Han: A New View of the Universe," 8–9, n. 9–12.

³⁴ The majority of jade suits excavated to date have been found in tombs belonging to members of the Liu family or valued members of their courts. As several hundred individuals are recorded by Sima Qian, it is likely that there were originally numerous rock cut tombs supplied with jade suits for their occupants. See Cheng-sheng Lin, "Han Burial Jades: the Role of Jade in Han Dynasty Tombs (206 BC-AD 220)" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 2002), vol. 2, appendix 2 for a table of Liu family members derived from the *Hanshu* and the *Hou Han shu*.

³⁵ See also James Lin, "Jade Suits and Iron Armour," in *East Asia Journal: Studies in Material Culture* 1 (2002), [forthcoming].

³⁶ *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 2 vols. (Beijing, 1980).

³⁷ These included lavatories, one of the indications that the tombs were to be lived in, see Li Yinde, "'The Underground Palace' of a Chu Prince at Beidongshan," *Orientalism* October 1990, 57, fig. 1.

³⁸ See the article by Anna Seidel cited in footnote 2 and Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare* (Albany, 1998), chapter 4.

charms against demons, other texts contain medical information and instructions on diet; some indicate methods of refining *qi*, a process that would enable a person to become a spirit, so it was thought.³⁹

We can also see that ambitions to join the spirits were present from pictures in tombs that show the tomb occupants enjoying a life with immortal companions. A tomb of the Wang Mang 王莽 (AD 9-25) period at Luoyang appears to show the tomb occupant in a dragon chariot enjoying a trip through the heavens (fig. 2).⁴⁰ Another, dating to the Eastern Han, at Cangshan 蒼山 in Shandong incorporates an inscription which suggests that the tomb occupant would feast with jade maidens.⁴¹

Michael Puett has argued that it was precisely these claims to live like a spirit, or to gain powers like those of spirits, that were central to the success of the often opposing notions of what we call correlative cosmology.⁴² For claims made by some thinkers in the fourth to first centuries BC that spirits were essential to the workings of the universe and that humans might become spirits were strongly contested. Although the debate was never finally resolved, by the first century BC, the view that the cosmos functioned without a prime mover seems to have come to dominate.⁴³ Yet spirits remained ever present in some peoples' minds and were therefore fitted into, but did not direct, the systematic cosmos.⁴⁴ Present in the universe, spirits were inevitably depicted as its inhabitants. But as interest in the correlative or systematic cosmos strengthened, its features were increasingly displayed in tombs, and, almost certainly, in buildings for the living. Such displays, in turn, seem to have reinforced the abstract philosophical ideas in the minds of the lay élite.

2. Theories of the Cosmos and the Role of Images

In the case of all theories, most especially religious ones that describe a generally invisible system in the universe, two conditions seem to recur. First, the principle notions that contribute to the theories are very likely to be explicable in terms of some aspects of human experience. Second, if such theories and their explanations turn out to have a wide influence, this influence may in large measure depend upon how effectively they can be presented visually. In addition, the theories, their principal tenets, and their visualisation have to be clearly linked; otherwise the three aspects do not reinforce, but rather undermine each other. The two categories of theory that we shall now consider are: first, the notion that the universe was created by deities, a view shared by people in the ancient and medieval Mediterranean area; second, the Chinese understanding of the cosmos, prevalent from the third

³⁹ For discussion from a medical point of view, see Donald Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought," 874-83; from a philosophical perspective, see Puett, *To Become a God*, 109-21.

⁴⁰ *Kaogu* 1991.8, 713-21.

⁴¹ Wu Hung, "Beyond the 'Great Boundary': Funerary Narratives in the Cangshan Tomb," in John Hay, ed., *Boundaries in China* (London, 1994), 81-104, esp. 96-97.

⁴² This is one of the major contributions of Michael Puett's work, *To Become a God*, 287-323.

⁴³ See Michael Puett's discussion that in the Han spirits ceased in the minds of philosophers to have independence, and moved according to the cosmos, *To Become a God*, 283-84.

⁴⁴ K.E. Brashier discusses these dual ambitions in "The Spirit Lord of Baishi Mountain: Feeding the Deities or Heeding the *Yinyang*?"

century BC, that the universe was a system of balanced and alternating forces within an ordered geometric framework. The first group of theories took their logic from familiar human powers and social relations. The second gained its coherence from observation of space and time and the orders and fluctuations of the natural world.

These differing views of the universe could be presented in diagrams (fig. 3) and images or in temporary or permanent structures, such as temples or palaces, or in ceremonies and rituals involving masks, dress and performance. Or the forces of the cosmos might manifest themselves in omens and miracles recorded in narratives or imagery. By making them visible, people could explore their universes, interact with them and attempt to control them.⁴⁵

We will examine first the theories of the nature of the universe and their presentation in the ancient and medieval worlds of the Mediterranean area.⁴⁶ Whether we look at the temples of ancient Egypt or read the *Book of Genesis*, we find accounts of universes in which gods have human-like features.⁴⁷ The ancient Egyptians personified their gods of the sky: Hathor, Bat and Horus; and of the earth: Osiris, Aker and Ptah-Tatenen. The air itself was personified also, as in Amun and Amunet.⁴⁸ The figural sculptures in which such deities were realised are familiar from the great temples of Egypt. While the God of Genesis is not portrayed, he too has human characteristics. His labours are chronicled in days and He is described as resting on the seventh day.

Of course, there were profound differences between the interpretations of the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Greeks or the medieval Christians, for example.⁴⁹ But the peoples in many areas and in diverse times imagined the deities wielding human-like powers in driving the sun, ruling the sea and guiding the seasons. Furthermore, the ways of the universe were affected by relationships, first of all between the deities themselves and secondarily between the deities and human beings. Social interactions were part of the authority and influence of the gods. The Christian Father and Son, the role of the Virgin as a Mother, and descriptions of the communities of believers as the Children of God form only one cluster of examples. The south doorway of Chartres Cathedral, with a multitude of sculptured figures, presents an extensive social realm: Christ and the Apostles, David and the Kings of Judah, the Saints and Martyrs, Prophets, Patriarchs, the Confessors and the personified virtues.⁵⁰ This tendency to configure the universe in terms of a social framework had at an

⁴⁵ The same issues occur in the modern world, where information grounded in scientific theories is concerned, see Edward Tufte, *Envisioning Information* (Cheshire, 1990).

⁴⁶ I use the term visual system here because I include in the discussion figural sculpture and painting, normally termed art by convention. However, in origin the figural images and their architectural settings formed integrated compositions.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the persistence of gods with human characteristics see, Robert Hinde, *Why Gods Persist: A Scientific Approach to Religion* (London and New York, 1998), chapter 6.

⁴⁸ Byron Shafer, ed., *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca and London, 1991), 33–35.

⁴⁹ The emotions raised by images presenting these relationships is discussed by David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago and London, 1989), 166–71. Such emotions are evidence of the ability of people to interact with deities through their images.

⁵⁰ Brigitte Kurmann-Schwarz and Peter Kurmann, *Chartres, La cathédrale*, trans. Thomas de Kayser (Auxerre, 2001), 358–59.

early stage given rise to an allegorical imagery of human qualities, such as Virtue and Love, presented in human forms.

A universe envisaged in this way has as its underlying structure or system the roles and rules of social relations. If one part of such a social system was described in a text or a set of images, other components could then be imagined by extension. The duties and actions of both gods and humans could be predicted by an individual on the basis of an understanding of their own particular society and of the specific roles assigned to gods and humans within that society. It was, therefore, not necessary to specify all details. Over several centuries, members of a society could extend and develop their concepts of their gods through their own understandings of relationships.⁵¹

In keeping with this social system, buildings were the meeting places for humans and gods, just as they were meeting places for people. In these buildings, be they the Great Temple at Abu Simmel, the Parthenon or Chartres Cathedral, painted or carved images were surrounded by pediments, architraves, arches and columns and stood on plinths. Such settings determined how close the faithful might approach to an image and from what angle they could view it. Similar arrangements were repeated throughout the ancient Mediterranean world and its medieval and modern successors.⁵² Whether we look at Egyptian and Greek temples, Roman Triumphal Arches in the Forum at Rome, or the facades of Gothic Cathedrals, such as Chartres, and Classical Revival buildings, such as the British Museum, we find the same combinations of painted and carved figures with architectural ornament.⁵³ This then was the foundation of the Mediterranean and later Western ornamented worlds.⁵⁴ These examples support the earlier claim that the figural imagery and its architectural settings inevitably meshed with an underlying theory about how the universe worked, expressed in terms of the relations of human-like deities.

The Chinese situation was very different. The Shang and the early Zhou peoples may have viewed their universe as, in part, dependent upon the powers of deities. But even at this time, the Shang and the Zhou did not present them in human form. They do not seem to have created anthropomorphic images with which they could engage, either directly as individuals or through intermediaries, such as priests. Indeed, their principal intermediaries, the ancestors as spirits, were invisible and the

⁵¹ Over the centuries, the Christian religion added servants and armies to the social structure already mentioned. The roles and characters of deities were made explicit in the ways in which they and their human adherents were portrayed in words and images. Biographies of the individual deities also contributed a complex symbolism, from the shield of Athena to the crucifix of Christ. This apparently common rule of thumb provided a system shared by many areas around the Mediterranean. It would appear that one of the benefits may have been that an existing system could be taken over and then adapted to a new religion or a new sect within a religion. In addition, the simple ways in which these relationships with gods could be multiplied, made it possible for different constituencies in a society to make use of the basic structure, adapting it to their own needs.

⁵² The decoration of temples with figures and architectural features was extended to palaces and from the highest levels of the élite found its way down society, to ornament not only buildings, but also many other artefact categories across most of Europe.

⁵³ The acanthus, originally married to such architecture, was a motif adapted readily to decorate jewellery, ritual objects, crowns and dress. For studies of the acanthus, see Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton, 1992).

⁵⁴ Jessica Rawson, *Chinese Ornament: the Lotus and the Dragon* (London, 1984) illustrates the ways in which what are treated as representational flower motifs in the Islamic world and later Western Europe came ultimately from China.



Shang and Zhou did not, it seems, seek to make them visible. The main instruments of physical and visible interaction were ceremonial banquets presented in fine food and wine vessels.⁵⁵

The First Emperor, and Han Wudi, sought control of a multitude of other spirits that they inherited from the peoples and rulers of the areas that they conquered and wished to dominate. They had no significant tradition of image-making to build upon.⁵⁶ Instead of depicting spirits, the Qin and Han made offerings to them, often at altars described in terms of the five colours of the ordered universe.⁵⁷ Here, a systematic geometric structure, rather than figural sculpture or painted images, was deployed. Such an approach is congruent with the view that the dominant understanding of the universe as a systematic cosmos took precedence over interest in specific spirits.⁵⁸

Indeed, as the rest of the paper will illustrate, the theories of a unified cosmos, whose parts were balanced and regulated without the intervention of deities, proved very durable. In such a system, interaction with human-like deities was not and could not be the primary way to obtain the benefits of the universe. Instead, during the third to second centuries BC, much attention was given to the patterns of the universe and to attempts to match them. Philosophical texts urged sages and rulers to observe these patterns and to follow them in their conduct. The physical parallel to this approach seems to have been to pattern buildings and tombs on the universe. It seems that the Chinese expressed and pursued their interaction with the cosmos in this way. Like all peoples, the Chinese would have liked to assure themselves of a good future.

Several features are constant in the presentation of the universe. It was described and replicated in standard ways that included a basic geometric form. This geometric form or structure had to be marked. Twelve characters, known as the branches, and the ten, known as the stems, were employed to divide circles and indicate cycles in twelve's and sixties (fig. 4). Position and orientation within the universe were of prime interest, and this was calculated with reference to such diagrams. The Chinese also placed images, as models and pictures, within the diagrams of the cosmos, making elaborate microcosms to mirror the features of the universe. The efficacy of these models depended, it would seem, on a certain accuracy of the parts, that is, of the images and of the models, of which the microcosms were composed. In addition, the notion that the universe comprised a multitude of systematically correlated entities was an essential component, as we shall see in the following examples.

There are two different contexts to be discussed, tombs for the afterlife and

⁵⁵ The offerings in bronze vessels seem to have been confined to the ancestors.

⁵⁶ Images of spirits or rulers contemporary with the Shang and or early Zhou existed among the peoples who created the bronzes found at Sanxingdui, Guanghan in Sichuan province, see Robert Bagley, ed., *Ancient Sichuan: Treasures from a Lost Civilization* (Seattle and Princeton, 2001), 59–151.

⁵⁷ Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, 103–21 describes the combination of official cults of the primary cosmological aspects and offerings to a wide variety of spirits. Sima Qian's chapter on the Feng and Shan sacrifices is full of references to colours of offerings to accord with the five directional system. For altars to the Five *di*, see Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 2, 35.

⁵⁸ In the post-Han period spirits were depicted, and skills developed to portray them supported a long tradition in depicting deities of the Buddhist and Daoist pantheons. However, the major impetus came from outside what we call China with the introduction of Buddhism and will, for that reason, not be considered here.

buildings for the living. Images had, we may surmise, slightly different functions in these. We learn from Sima Qian's account of the First Emperor's reign that buildings or tombs modelled after part or the whole of the cosmos were the norm. These include the Epang 阿房 palace near present-day Xi'an, configured like the constellations,⁵⁹ so providing the Emperor with a residence whose features made it analogous with those of deities; the replicas of the palaces of the conquered states at the palace at Xianyang 咸陽 created a microcosm of the political framework of which the First Emperor had become master. The most significant microcosm was the tomb at Mount Li.

In the ninth month the First Emperor was interred at Mt. Li....Palaces and scenic towers, and the hundred officials, as well as rare utensils and wonderful objects were brought to fill up the tomb....Above were all the heavenly bodies, below the features of the earth.⁶⁰

A tomb so designed became a universe.⁶¹ A particular characteristic of the Chinese language is that no distinction is required between the Western notions of original and replica, and thus no question is asked of whether it is a universe or a replica of a universe. This issue of such a model actually becoming a universe and not being merely a replica is extremely important.

No example is more striking than the terracotta warriors. They seem to fit very nicely the hypothesis that a microcosm functioned like the macrocosm and was no mere replica. These, by now famous, figures are life size and presented in great detail, so that their military capacities are immediately evident. We cannot take the view that they were there to impress the courts of competing powers; for the soldiers were buried out of sight below ground and were never seen in their entirety by the living. The most telling detail of all is provided by the real weapons in the hands of the soldiers. The only explanation that we can give today to account for these weapons is that they were to allow the soldiers to fight for and defend the First Emperor in the afterlife.⁶² He had, after all, massacred the armies of six states. These armies might be waiting for the Emperor in the afterlife.

⁵⁹ Watson, *The Qin Dynasty*, 45, 56.

⁶⁰ See *Shi ji*, (Beijing, 1969), vol.1, 265; Watson, *The Qin Dynasty*, 63. The translation has been modified to omit words like replica, which are not in the original.

⁶¹ Extensive excavations over many decades have revealed the complex of functions that were provided to create a complete afterlife for the Emperor. The most recent discovery is of an administrative office; see *Wenwu* 2002.3: 4–31.

⁶² These important observations were first made by Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things, Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton, 2000), chapter 3. In addition, as discussions in Sima Qian's history, the *Shi ji*, make plain, an image became the thing imaged. He describes the tomb mound over the First Emperor's tomb as a mountain for example. Watson, *The Qin Dynasty*, 64. In this paragraph, the term at issue is *xiang*. See Willard Peterson, "Making Connections: 'Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations' of the *Book of Changes*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.1 (1982): 67–116. The relevance of this term to pictures and models in tombs is more fully discussed in Jessica Rawson, "The Power of Images: the Model Universe of the First Emperor and its Legacy," *Historical Research* 75.188 (2002): 123–54. For a discussion of images in post Han tombs, see Jessica Rawson, "Creating Universes: Cultural Exchange as Seen in Tombs in Northern China between the Han and Tang Periods," in Wu Hung, ed., *Between Han and Tang: Cultural and Artistic Interactions in a Transformative Period* (Beijing, 2001), 113–149. As mentioned above, an important aspect of images was that they should function as the thing imaged. Sima Qian recounts the advice of a *fangshi*, or "practitioner," Shaoweng, advising Han Wudi that if he wanted to attract spirits, he should put images of them on his robes. Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 2, 41–42.



In the sections that follow, I shall discuss archaeological evidence that supports the view that images and models were necessary components of tombs, making them into universes for the afterlife. Without this hypothesis, the construction and decoration of tombs of all periods are difficult to explain. In addition, from many later stories of the post-Han, Tang (AD 618-906) and Song periods (AD 960-1279), we learn that the educated lay public, at least, often viewed tomb pictures and models as functioning components of this afterlife. Such concerns with function probably explain the extraordinary attention to detail, not only of the terracotta warriors, and but also of the servants and musicians in much later tombs. What is more, texts make it evident that the peoples of the time thought that the tomb figures themselves functioned as servants and did not, by some sort of magic, become replaced by servants.⁶³

The microcosms created with images in buildings for the living were probably somewhat different. Furthermore, over the period concerned, these may have been viewed from a variety of perspectives. However, the textual evidence now to be reviewed provides examples of the way in which people often took it for granted that some pictures functioned like the thing imaged.

3. Correlative Cosmology and Material Culture

Numerous accounts refer to pictures of dragons and their ability to bring the rain that, in the Chinese imagination, would accompany "real" dragons. As early as the late Han period sceptic, Wang Chong 王充, dragon paintings were said to create or bring about rain.

The Duke of She in Ch'u had a penchant for dragons on walls: --panels, vases, and goblets he had pictures of dragons painted. A genuine dragon heard of it and came down. Dragons, clouds, and rain are of the same fluid, wherefore they can mutually affect each other, following their species. By making pictures, the Duke of She succeeded in bringing down a real dragon. Why should it not be possible now, to attract clouds and rain.⁶⁴

Wang Chong went on to remark that that the Duke of Chu would have enjoyed much rain.⁶⁵ This link between dragons and rain was, as the above passage makes clear, an aspect of a correlated universe. For rain and dragons belong to the same category, and for this reason, in the words of the second century philosophical text, the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, "The many kinds move (or behave), mutually responding to each other; and the basic (such as the sun and the moon) and the peripherals (such as birds and clams) mutually correspond."⁶⁶ The correlation between the "real" dragon and rain was here extended to the pictured dragon and "real" rain.

⁶³ Glen Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang Society: A Reading of Tai Fu's Kuang-I chi* (Cambridge, 1995), appendix, nos. 4, 11, 119, 138, 158, 159, 161, 169.

⁶⁴ *Lun-heng, Philosophical Essays of Wang Ch'ung*, translated from the Chinese and annotated by Alfred Forke, 2 vols. (New York, 1962), vol. 2, 352.

⁶⁵ Michael Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China* (Cambridge, 1994), chapter 7.

⁶⁶ Kiyohiko Munakata, "The Concepts of *Lei* and *Kan-lei* in Early Chinese Art Theory," in Susan Bush and Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton, 1983), 105-31.

Huang Xiufu 黃休復 in the early eleventh century text, the *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄, composed in the western state of Shu 蜀 (present-day Sichuan province), recounts a story of the achievements of the artist Cao Fuxing 曹弗興 and the use of his dragon painting to bring a drought to an end.⁶⁷ Certain types of pictures could be used to achieve the effects of the thing imaged, and the effects of an image were determined by the overall correlated structure of the cosmos. So, one purpose of models or images of parts of or the whole of the universe was to ensure that it responded in a desired way. If this was to happen, pictures and models had to be correctly made, that is, with a certain degree of accuracy, and, it seems, correctly positioned or oriented.⁶⁸

Western sculptures and pictures presented deities to believers with whom they might interact.⁶⁹ In China, images provide aspects of a total universe. When displayed in tombs, these images fit the view that the images themselves enabled the tomb occupant to have a good afterlife, with appropriate servants and comforts. Pictures were, it seems, especially valued by the living if they provided the effects of their subjects. The following section will describe how these images were arranged according to the geometry of the universe and how their subjects were those of the major features of the cosmos. Such pictures thus conform with the view proposed above that the Chinese proceeded to create microcosms to present and so gain the benefits of the universe.

3.1 The Geometry of the Universe

The geometric structure of the universe was one that could be easily rendered in a diagram, and this alone may have been one of the underlying conditions that led to its particular formulation (fig. 4). Indeed, we find that the basic scheme of four

⁶⁷ *Yizhou minghua lu* in Yu Anlan, *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), 25–26.

⁶⁸ Realistic images were not confined to tombs, but were much prized and commented upon in paintings for the living. The tenth century artist Huang Quan, living in the western Kingdom of Shu, is often cited. He painted cranes that were so lifelike that real cranes came to see them; the same artist is also said to have painted a pheasant with such skill that it was several times attacked by an eagle, see *Yizhou minghua lu*, in Yu Anlan, *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), vol. 6, 13–14. The power of images extended to the supernatural. A King of Shu dreamed that a spirit appeared to him in a dream and asked for attention to his foot. The King therefore ordered a painting that depicted the spirit, which had a damaged foot, to be repaired. The spirit then appeared a dream to thank the King, who in turn was so alarmed that he asked for the painting to be destroyed, *Yizhou minghua lu* in Yu Anlan, *Huashi congshu*, vol. 6, *juan* 2, 19.

⁶⁹ Images have potency among all peoples. They are one of the means by which an abstract and invisible presence can be made visible and so allow human interaction. The anthropomorphic images in their temples of the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean world and their successors were valued as the loci where the person might interact with the deity. As Hans Belting and others have argued, in many cases people did not distinguish between the deity and its image. The central work in this discussion is Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago and London, 1994); see also Susan Verdi Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain: Sevillian Confraternities and the Processional Sculpture of Holy Week* (Princeton, 1998), 186–87. The deity was thought to be effective in its image. However, both the ancient philosophers, especially Plato, and Christian theologians repeatedly attacked this position.



directions was very ancient.⁷⁰ An assumption that the universe and its parts could be represented geometrically led in the Warring States and Han periods to an elaboration of a square into grids of five or nine smaller squares.⁷¹ Both the Heavens and the Earth were thought to be so divided. An early mention occurs in the compilation of poetry, the *Shijing*, or *Book of Songs* (c. 600BC), and later references to the nine provinces, or nine continents, occur in the “Yu Gong 禹貢” chapter, one of the later chapters of the historical text, the *Shangshu* (possibly third century BC). The legendary Emperor Yu was described as pacing out the nine continents.⁷² As the Earth was thought to parallel the Heavens, and the palaces of the states were symbols of earthly rule, the skies were likewise thought to contain palaces (inhabited by deities), also arranged in a grid. These geometric patternings of the cosmos were to affect formal building and city plans as well as tombs, and to ensure that four-part directional symmetries, or grids of five and nine, were the norms underlying all design.

Moreover, Han period accounts of the idealised building known as the Ming Tang 明堂, demonstrate the widely held assumption that a geometrically organised microcosm could represent the macrocosm, namely the universe, and be used for the benefit of the state. In the third century text, the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, the ruler is described as moving between the different rooms or sectors of the building in accord with the seasons. In a later Han period text, the *Baihutong* 白虎通, the Ming Tang is pictured more fully and is presented as the site where the emperor established rapport with Heaven and Earth.⁷³

The Son of Heaven erects the *Ming Tang*, that he may enter into communication with the spiritual forces, undergo [the influences of] Heaven and Earth, keep the four seasons in the right track, put forth his reforming teachings, honour those who have spiritual power, give due weight to those who walk in the right way, make illustrious the capable, and reward those who practise good conduct....

⁷⁰ The view of the world as comprising four directions, *Sifang*, may have been one element in Shang cosmological notions as mirrored in oracle bone inscriptions (Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*. Chapter 2). A Shang sacrificial cult to the four winds is also recorded. Hu Houxuan, “Jiaguwen sifang fengming kaozhen” in *Jiaguxue Shang shi luncong chu ji* (Chengdu, 1944), 369–81. These directions were elaborated in the Warring States period, and later, by the addition of the centre, creating five in all. The divisions of space and time by characters, known as the twelve branches and the ten stems had also come into existence by the Shang period. Transformation of the twelve branches into the zodiac and its representation is discussed in Judy Chungwa Ho, “The Twelve Calendrical Animals in Tang tombs” in George Kuwayama, ed., *Ancient Mortuary Traditions of China: Papers on Chinese Ceramic Funerary Sculptures* (Los Angeles, 1991), 60–83.

⁷¹ John Major, “The Five Phases, Magic Squares and Schematic Cosmography,” in *Explorations in Early Chinese Cosmology*, ed. Henry Rosemont, Jr. (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Thematic Studies, 50/2), 1984, 133–66.

⁷² I am indebted to Mark Lewis’s forthcoming book on concepts of space and to Martin Kern for references to the *Shijing* and the *Shangshu*. See Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation*, American Oriental Series, vol. 85 (New Haven, 2000), 79, and 116–18.

⁷³ Maps or diagrams of the universe, on which everything could be notionally located, were extended to yet more abstract notions, such as a presentation of human qualities. Indeed, the philosophical text by Guanzi (compiled in the Han period, but containing earlier material) suggests that the actions of a good ruler could be located geometrically in a chart of human activity. See “Initiate [undertakings] and issue [orders] in accordance with the rules of propriety. Then timeliness and propriety will certainly be achieved. Be harmonious and agreeable and refrain from perniciousness. Then the honoured and the lowly will not engage in litigations. [If these are done] the fluctuations in seasonal affairs will occur on the proper day. The preceding is situated on the outer side of the eastern part of the chart,” in W. Allen Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China, A Study and Translation*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1985, 1998), vol. 1, 176–77.

The top is round in imitation of Heaven; the bottom is square in imitation of Earth. The eight windows represent Eight Winds, the four doors the Four Seasons; the nine compartments the Nine Provinces, the twelve seats the Twelve Months, the thirty-six single doors the Thirty-Six Rains, the seventy-two window-openings the Seventy-Two Winds.⁷⁴

Other man-made microcosms of the universe are described in Han period *fu* 賦, or rhapsodies, on palaces and parks. The most famous of these is that of the Shanglin Park by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BC). Vegetation, animals and even climate that matched the terrestrial world as a whole marked the directions or quadrants of the universe.⁷⁵ Wang Yanshou's 王延壽 (fl. AD 163) *fu* on the *Hall of Numinous Brilliance in Lu* (魯靈光殿賦) presents a building as a cosmos and emphasises the geometric pattern of the universe in his record of "three compartments, four exteriors, eight sectors and nine corners."⁷⁶

Archaeological excavations of the last few years have brought to light Han period diagrams (*tu* 圖), of many types which present a geometric universe. Many, including the examples in figures 4 and 5, were intended for divination or as talismans; they were, in fact, images with functions.⁷⁷ The Nine Palace diagram (fig. 5), excavated from tomb 3 at Mawangdui at Changsha in Hunan province, is a cosmological microcosm intended as a guide to events in the heavens and conduct in the human world.⁷⁸ While the diagram is completely geometric and its number of nine sections matches the nines already mentioned, spirits such as the Wind Sire (Fengbo 風伯) and the Thunder Lord (Leigong 雷公) were also fitted into it.⁷⁹

The fundamental diagram used during the Warring States (475–221 BC), Qin (221–207 BC) and Han periods (206 BC–AD 220) was the cord-hook diagram (fig. 6).⁸⁰ Long known from mirrors and boards for the *liubo* 六博 game, the same configuration also occurs on some recently excavated divination texts. An example in a third century BC manuscript from Shashi in Hubei province shows crossed cords passing through the centre, which according to the Han text, the *Huainanzi*, held up the heavens (fig. 6). At the corners are the angular hooks. The characters around the edges indicate the four directions, the five phases, the twelve branches, the ten stems, the twenty-eight lunar lodges (the constellations through which the moon was seen to pass), and a division of the day into twenty-eight parts.

⁷⁴ As described in the *Baihutong*, see Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po Hu T'ung: the Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1952), 488.

⁷⁵ David Knechtges, trans., *Wen Xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature by Xiao Tong* (Princeton, 1987), vol. 2, 74–114. Lothar Ledderose, "The Earthly Paradise: Religious Elements in Chinese Landscape Art," in Susan Bush and Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton, 1983), 165–83 provides the foundation for discussion of parks as presenting a part of the universe.

⁷⁶ Knechtges, *Wen Xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature by Xiao Tong*, vol. 2, 269.

⁷⁷ Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao* (Beijing, 2001), 2 vols., vol. 1, 89–176 discusses a wide range of material, including the so called diviner's boards, the Chu silk manuscript and accounts in several texts.

⁷⁸ See also *Wenwu* 2000.3, 75–84, figs. 3–4. While the Ming Tang is certainly no longer a model for an Imperial palace, the disposition of the Forbidden City in Beijing, with the altars of the sun and moon to the east and west and the Temple of the Heaven in the south and the Altar to the Earth in the north, shows the ways in which at a much later period, yet again, a cosmic diagram was chosen so as to locate the emperor appropriately.

⁷⁹ Donald Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought," 851.

⁸⁰ Donald Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought," 837, and Marc Kalinowski, "The Xingde Texts from Mawangdui," trans. Phyllis Brooks, *Early China* 23–24 (1998–99), 125–202.

The version of this diagram on what are known as TLV mirrors (on account of the markings that look like the Western letters), dating from the first century BC to the first century AD (fig. 7), is much more pictorial.⁸¹ The geometrical framework was turned into a microcosm using images inserted into the angular pattern.

The heavy circular rim of the mirror provides the heavens, with the square earth at the centre. Here the angular hooks of the cord-hook diagrams are evident. The Ts and Ls mark the positions of the crossed cords. The eight pairs of bosses around the outside of the square are probably the pairs of pillars holding up the heavens, while the bosses within the square frame separate the twelve characters of the branches. The four creatures of the directions—the dragon of the east, tiger of the west, bird of the south and the turtle, entwined with a snake, of the north—together with other supernatural beings fill the spaces within this geometric configuration. This is not so much a divining instrument as a talisman.⁸² Mirrors were, sometimes placed over the head of the dead in a specially constructed lacquered wooden frame. From this position it is possible to infer that they had some important purpose.⁸³ Their inscriptions also convey messages, ensuring a good future life for their owners. The growing interest in the geometric pattern of the cosmos is signalled by the large numbers of TLV mirrors buried in tombs from the late second century BC.

Epitaph covers, common from the sixth century AD, are another kind of embellished cosmic diagram. Square in plan, these stones were shaped as truncated pyramids and placed over the square slabs on which the titles and achievements of the deceased were inscribed. On the cover, the name and title of the tomb owner were written in bold characters at the centre. The four animals of the directions often surround these titles, as on a fine early sixth century example from Luoyang (fig. 8). Zhao Chao 趙超 has argued that this arrangement set the tomb occupant at the centre of a miniature universe, and such epitaph covers illustrate the way in which explicit orientation of a person within the universe could be achieved in a diagram.⁸⁴

The tomb of the First Emperor himself is an example of the way a diagram can act as the foundation for a more complex model.⁸⁵ The tomb's square plan is in itself an outline of the Earth. But this is no longer an embellished diagram locating a person symbolically through his name and title as on an epitaph cover. Instead the diagram, and its additional images and models within and around it, create a universe for the afterlife, with the Emperor at the centre. For a passage by Sima Qian, quoted above, indicates that the interior was thought to have been decorated with the heavenly bodies and the rivers of the earth, the latter created in mercury.

⁸¹ Loewe, *Ways to Paradise*, 83–84, 192–203.

⁸² Compare Schuyler Cammann, "The 'TLV' Pattern on Cosmic Mirrors of the Han Dynasty," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 68 (1948): 159–67; Loewe, *Ways to Paradise*, 60–85. A rather different account is given by Lan-ying Tseng, "Picturing Heaven: Image and Knowledge in Han China" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 2001), chapter 1.

⁸³ See for example tomb 1 at Yangzhichang, Pingshan, Jiangsu province, *Wenwu* 1987.1: 26–36.

⁸⁴ Zhao Chao, "Shi qionglongding mushi yu fudouxing muzhi, jiantan gudai muzang zhong 'xiang tiandi' de sixiang," *Wenwu* 1999.5: 72–82.

⁸⁵ Rawson, "The Power of Images," considers the role of the tomb as realisation of a universe and implications of the term *tu*.

In the early Han, tomb plans were highly complex. But from some point in the first century BC, in some parts of the central area, most especially at Luoyang, the ceilings of tombs were made as vaults and later as domes to represent the heavens above a square or rectangular plan. The cosmological scheme generally seems to have applied to the main tomb chamber and did not embrace all spaces in a multi-chambered tomb.⁸⁶

In what follows, three tombs will be taken to represent changing patterns over many centuries: a late Western Han tomb at Xi'an (fig. 9), a fourth to fifth century AD tomb at Jiuquan 酒泉 in Gansu province (fig. 11a), and the tomb of Wang Chuzhi 王處直 (d. 923 AD), who was buried at Quyang 曲陽 in Hebei (figs. 13-15).⁸⁷ Evidence is abundant and selection is inevitable. However, use and reuse of standard forms, over more than a thousand years, seem to have reinforced practices in the ways in which tombs were built. In every century or dynasty traces of the decoration of tombs that reproduce the cosmos are evident.

The four creatures of the directions and images of the Queen Mother of the West and of her partner the Lord of the East 東皇公 explicitly orientated a tomb. From the sixth century, various forms of the space-time divisions, represented by creatures-sometimes called the zodiac-were employed. The animals of the directions appear on the ceiling of the Western Han tomb at Xi'an (fig. 9), and we find the Queen Mother and the Eastern Lord in the tomb at Jiuquan (fig. 11b, c). Wang Chuzhi's tomb is coordinated with space and time by the twelve figures of the zodiac, holding their appropriate creatures, around the walls just below the arc of the sky (fig. 14). In a tomb of similar date in Zhejiang, these zodiac creatures are combined with the animals of the directions to make this geometric organisation more emphatic.⁸⁸

Once the geometric space-time structure is recognised as the substrate of these compositions, the role of the embellishment now to be described becomes explicable.

3.2 The Features of the Universe

The most important aspects of the cosmos, whose images were placed within the grids, charts, and symmetrically planned tombs and buildings, were the heavenly bodies, the mountains and rivers and the myriad phenomena of the world, known as the Ten Thousand Things, especially the plants, birds, animals and insects. All of these figure in models of the cosmos, and all of these contributed subject matter to the artistic and ornamental traditions. Here, I examine, in turn, the heavenly bodies,

⁸⁶ Two Han period tombs at Mi Xian in Henan province are good examples of fully developed Eastern Han tombs, *Mi Xian Dahuting Hanmu* (Beijing, 1993). In tomb two the heavens are indicated by alternating panels of lotus flowers and painted imitations of wooden roof structures, also employed at Dunhuang to indicate the summit of the heavens.

⁸⁷ *Xi'an Jiaotong Daxue Xi Han bihuamu* (Xi'an, 1991); *Wenwu* 1979.6: 1-17; see too *Wudai Wang Chuzhi mu* (Beijing, 1998).

⁸⁸ *Wenwu* 2002.2: 4-34. See Judy Chungwa Ho, "The Twelve Calendrical Animals in Tang tombs"; Hsieh Ming-lang, "Chutu wenwu suojian Zhongguo shier zhishou de xingtai bianqian, Bei Chao zhi Wudai," *Gugong xueshu jikan* 3.3 (1985-1986), 59-105.



the mountains and the four seasons as generating the myriad things. During the Han period, in particular, other subjects were included, for example exemplary figures of rulers and statesmen and certain deities, such as the Queen Mother of the West. These figure subjects, in turn, gave rise to other artistic traditions. There is not, however, space to consider these here.

3.2.1 The Heavens: the Heavenly Bodies

The cosmos was divided into Heaven and Earth. Within the Heavens, inevitably, the sun and moon were predominant. Texts from the time of the *Shijing*, and continuing through the succeeding centuries of the Warring States and Han, mention the sun and moon as primary among the heavenly phenomena, and Sima Qian cites them as receiving offerings at altars.⁸⁹ As the *Liji* 禮記 notes: "Heaven exercises the control of the strong and light force and hangs out the sun and the moon."⁹⁰ We know that the stars were a source of interest from at least the fifth century BC. Pre-dating any example in a surviving tomb structure is a clothes box found in a late fifth century BC tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng 曾侯乙, excavated at Suixian 隨縣 in Hubei province (fig. 3). To right and left are the green dragon and the white tiger, amongst the earliest representations of this duo.⁹¹ At the centre is the northern dipper, and, surrounding it, the twenty-eight constellations through which the moon was seen to move, known as the twenty-eight lunar lodges. Sun, moon and constellations occur on many tomb ceilings. Painted Han examples are well known at Luoyang, and a late Western Han example, already mentioned, is at Xi'an (fig. 9).⁹²

Although by no means all major elite tombs of the post Han period were provided with depictions of the heavens, and many that were have probably decayed, there is ample evidence that, from the Han period, pictures and even maps of stars were employed in many tombs (fig. 10). In the post-Han period, especially from the sixth century AD, star-maps of some complexity appear on their ceilings. The tenth century provides some of the most complete. A detailed example occurs in the front room of the tomb of Wang Chuzhi (fig. 13).⁹³ Sun, Moon, constellations and the Milky Way decorate the arched ceiling. They combine with the zodiac figures around the walls of the front room to transform the room into a geometric space-time diagram, which is, simultaneously, a depiction of the heavens (fig. 14).⁹⁴

While very few buildings from these periods survive above ground, we know from references in early texts on paintings, such as the ninth century text, the *Lidai*

⁸⁹ Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian*, vol. 2, 29.

⁹⁰ Legge, *The Li Ki, The Sacred Books of the East*, xxvii, 381.

⁹¹ A much earlier example is the pair of creatures laid out in shells in a Neolithic burial at Puyang in Henan province; see Kaogu 1989.12, 1057–66.

⁹² Huang Minglan, Guo Yinqiang, *Luoyang Hanmu bihua mu* (Beijing, 1996) *Xi'an Jiaotong Daxue Xi Han bihuamu* (Xi'an, 1991), 25 and *Wenwu* 1974.12, 56–60 for a Northern Wei tomb and *Zhongguo gudai tianwen wenwu tuji* (Beijing, 1980), no. 59, for a Tang tomb.

⁹³ *Wudai Wang Chuzhi mu*.

⁹⁴ Another instance in which the directional animals as well as zodiac figures accompanies the depiction of the heavens is in the tomb of the concubine of the ruler of Wu/Yue Qian Yuanhuan, at Zhejiang (dated 939), see *Wenwu* 2000.2: 4–34, fig. 27.

minghua ji 歷代名畫記, that many paintings, diagrams and maps of the constellations and the lunar lodges were made.⁹⁵ Some are described as wall paintings and would support the thesis that images turned the spaces that they adorned into miniature universes. In later centuries, the constellations may have been given figural shape. Though, when they appear in lists of paintings in the catalogue of the Emperor Hui-zong's 慧宗 (1101–1125) painting collection, the *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜, it is not clear from the listed titles whether the paintings were similar to charts or maps, as on the ceiling of Wang Chuzhi, or were figural images like the zodiac figures in the same tomb.⁹⁶

But much more common are images of the sun and the moon by themselves, as on the renowned Mawangdui banner (fig. 1).⁹⁷ Many later Han tombs present the sun and the moon in stone carvings (fig. 10). They are especially frequent in screen paintings from at least the sixth century AD, as shown on a coffin bed stone screen found at Tianshui 天水 in Gansu province (fig. 12). Here two discs appear at the middle of the three panels that form the sides of the couch. Figures of authority, rulers and deities, were often presented in front of such images to indicate the range of their powers.⁹⁸ The legacy of these early Chinese screens was extensive, reaching Korea and Japan. In Japan, the Emperor is sometimes still seated for certain ceremonies in front of images of the sun and moon.

3.2.2 The Earth: the Mountains

As described in Warring States and Han period texts, the Earth balanced the Heavens. The *Liji* states: "Earth exercises the control of the dark and weak forces and gives vent to it in the hills and streams."⁹⁹ This term hills (or mountains) and streams, *shan chuan* 山川, when used in later texts, is a reference to these essential features of the Earth.

Mountains were often, and perhaps inevitably, revered as linking the Heavens and the Earth. The ancient historical text, the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (variously dated to the fifth to third centuries BC), states this succinctly: "the mountains stand up and are the companions of heaven."¹⁰⁰ The five directional mountains belong to the systematic cosmos already outlined. Like the lore on the stars, interest in mountains came from ancient and possibly entirely local traditions, and the peaks were then inserted into the directional pattern.¹⁰¹ There is much evidence in both early texts, such

⁹⁵ Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji*, annotated by Qin Zhongwen and Huang Miaozi (Beijing, 1963), *juan* 3, 73–78.

⁹⁶ *Xuanhe huapu*, in Yu Anlan, ed., *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), vol. 2, *juan* 1, 9, *juan* 2, 15, 17.

⁹⁷ *Changsha Mawangdui yihao Hanmu* (Beijing, 1973), vol. 1, fig. 38.

⁹⁸ See the figure of the female deity at the Jinci in Taiyuan, Shanxi province (dated AD 1087), *Zhongguo Meishu quanji: diaosu bian*, vol. 5, *Wudai Song diaosu* (Beijing, 1988), no. 85.

⁹⁹ Legge, *The Li Ki, The Sacred Books of the East*, xxvii, 381.

¹⁰⁰ *Zuozhuan*, Duke Huan 22 year, see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: Volume V, The Ch'un Tseu with The Tso Chuen* (Taipei reprint, no date), 103.

¹⁰¹ The many different peaks discussed by Sima Qian in his chapter of the Feng and Shan sacrifices, which include some directional ones, illustrates the multiplicity of sources of interest in mountains, Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 2, 28–29.



as the oracle bone inscriptions, and the later writings of Sima Qian, that various mountain cults were current over many centuries. Some of these were deliberately ordered as aspects of the directional scheme. Others were incorporated in the state cults commanded by the First Emperor and Han Wudi. And, over the centuries, further mountain cults emerged and were subsumed into other religious systems, most especially of Daoism, but also of Buddhism.¹⁰²

The interest in numinous mountains remained strong over the centuries, because, alongside the peaks included in the systematic cosmological pattern, mountains were linked with a profound interest in spirits and with efforts to meet with them and even to control them, or to become one of them. The very height of the mountains, with their peaks mingling with clouds and vapours, drew attention to the concepts of *qi* and the refined *qi* required to become a spirit. Height too recalled notions of ascension to join the spirits. From at least the time of the First Emperor and Han Wudi, the mountains on the Immortal Islands in the eastern sea were renowned. Repeated references in both literature and paintings were also made to the great mountain range in the west, Kunlun, the reputed home of the deity, the Queen Mother of the West.

The mountains employed as tombs, either in the form of artificial mounds on the Yellow River plain, or the limestone hills of eastern China into which the courts bored great mansions for the afterlife of members of the Imperial family, would appear to be surrogates or analogues of mountains where immortals might be encountered. Whole mountain complexes were recruited as eternal homes, not only for the princes of the Liu family but also for the Tang emperors. Imperial tombs of other dynasties were constructed as artificial mountains on the Yellow River plain.

One of the best pictures of mountains as simultaneously linking heaven and earth and as homes of spirits and immortals occurs in the tomb at Jiuquan in Gansu province (fig. 11). A range of mountains around the principal chamber divides the heavens from the earth. Seated on a peak is the Queen Mother of the West, facing the Lord of the East on the opposite wall (fig. 11b, c). Rising amid swirling clouds, and perhaps *qi*, are figures of a deer, a horse and a spirit or immortal (figs 11d, e). Mountains were, thus, presented as primary components of the universe, with a conspicuous role in dividing or linking Heaven and Earth, revered also for connections with a spirit world.

A painting of a screen, placed on the wall dividing the front room from the rear one in the tomb of Wang Chuzhi (AD 923), shows the way in which mountainous landscape was incorporated in a pictorial description of the universe. The screen displays mountains, with a river meandering between promontories (fig. 14). The scene complements the heavens depicted on the ceiling above. In line with the thesis that images in tombs not only make them congruent with the universe, but also provided what they depict, the landscape painting may have been, literally, a route for the

¹⁰² James Robson, "The Polymorphous Space of the Southern Marchmont [Nanyue], An Introduction to Nanyue's Religious History and Preliminary Notes on Buddhist-Daoist Interaction," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995): 221–64.

deceased to scale such mountains and so find the eternal, garden-like paradise of the rear room.

Mountainous landscapes, often with water, became the most important subjects for paintings—which, with calligraphy, made up later China's principal artistic traditions.¹⁰³ Peaks also appeared in ornament, especially amid the sea, a reference to the islands of the immortals. They were also frequently pictured in the context of the four seasons, the other major feature of the Earth.

3.2.3 The Earth and the Four Seasons

Early texts describing the Earth frequently mention the four seasons. The *Liji*, already cited above, reports Confucius as saying: "If there were not the united action of heaven and earth, the world of things would not grow."¹⁰⁴ The philosophical text, the *Guanzi* 管子, states: "Accordingly, the *yin* and *yang* are the primary organizational principle of heaven and earth, and the four seasons are the primary pattern of *yin* and *yang*."¹⁰⁵ In many Warring States and Han period texts, the four seasons are given the status of constants, in parallel with *yin* and *yang*, as here, or the five phases, the heavenly bodies and the alternation of night and day.

A proper succession of the seasons is always essential to ensure a good harvest. Inscriptions on the Shang oracle bones suggest that in ancient China, this was a major preoccupation.¹⁰⁶ From the Han period, tombs depict aspects of the yearly round, a good harvest, or the products of the trees and plants of the summer. These might be presented in wall-paintings or carvings or in models of animals and farm buildings—wells, granaries and pigsties. By the date of the fourth to fifth century AD tomb at Jiuquan in Gansu province, orchards seem to have been popular (fig. 11d, e).¹⁰⁷

More elaborate scenes of landscapes with flowers, birds and animals occur in tombs of the sixth century and later. These are relevant to our understanding of the way in which the genres now described as "bird and flower" painting emerged out of the tradition of presenting the four seasons. These later tombs often include screens that show the tomb occupants in landscapes surrounded by animals and plants as part of the natural world, rather than as necessities for food and survival. Two developments may have fostered this step away from everyday farming. The first seems to have been the presence of foreign rulers in northern China, whose life style included hunting and feasting in the open air.¹⁰⁸ The second was the widespread use of flower

¹⁰³ The subject of the foundations of mountain representations is discussed in much fuller detail in Jessica Rawson, "The Origins of Chinese Mountain Painting: Evidence from Archaeology" (forthcoming in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 107).

¹⁰⁴ Legge, *The Li Ki, The Sacred Books of the East*, xxvii, 265.

¹⁰⁵ W. Allen Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*, vol. 2, 111.

¹⁰⁶ David Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China (ca.1200–1045 B.C.)*, 9–16.

¹⁰⁷ For a summary report, see *Wenwu* 1979.6: 1–17.

¹⁰⁸ Examples are seen in a very unusual sixth century tomb of a Zoroastrian reported in *Wenwu* 2001.1, 4–26; see also *Wenwu* 2000.7: 85–94 and *Wenwu* 2001.7: 40–51.

motifs in Buddhism.¹⁰⁹ The craftsmen who painted the tomb of Wang Chuzhi, with its display of peonies and other spring and summer flowers on screens, now presented the seasons not through harvests and crops, but through seasonal plants (fig. 15). The screens also show birds and insects. Flowers, birds, butterflies and other insects match the comments in the *Lüshi chunqiu* and Han period texts on the stirrings of nature that indicate spring and summer.¹¹⁰ We know that we are on the right track in identifying these bushy flowers as presenting the seasons, because similar plants appear in the representation of summer in the Imperial Liao 遼 tomb at the Qingling 慶陵 dated to the eleventh century (fig. 16).¹¹¹ Here four large seasonal wall paintings around a central chamber display landscapes with similar flowers and trees, animals and birds.

Supporting evidence comes from the painting texts already mentioned. The tenth century artist, Huang Quan 黃筌, described in the *Yizhou minghua lu* (mentioned above) is said to have painted the walls of the Bagua 八卦 palace of the King of Shu, in Sichuan, with the birds and flowers of the four seasons.¹¹² Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 in the eleventh century, in his account of famous artists, provides numerous examples of paintings of landscapes of the four seasons and of paintings of birds and flowers, and sometimes of animals and insects, designated as being of the four seasons.¹¹³ The catalogue, the *Xuanhe huapu*, even organises the lists of paintings under each artist in the bird and flower section of the catalogue by the seasons. Thus while it is customary to think today of a separate painting genre of birds and flowers, these images fit the view that a primary motive for flower and bird paintings in tombs and buildings was to represent aspects of the cosmos, in this case the myriad things produced by the four seasons.

While the tomb at Qingling suggests an open natural landscape, later tombs more usually depict interiors of buildings. This has the advantage for us of illustrating the ways in which a house may have been decorated in life to ensure the benevolent effects of spring and summer flowers. A Northern Song period tomb at Mangshan 邙山, near Luoyang is an example. Hanging paintings and screens are shown against a background of other furnishings represented in the tomb (fig. 17). Some Liao and

¹⁰⁹ For discussions of flower motifs, see Ellen Laing, "The Development of Flower Depiction and the Origin of the Bird-and-Flower Genre in Chinese Art," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 64 (1992): 180–223; "A Survey of Liao Dynasty Bird-and-Flower Painting," *Journal of Sung and Yuan Studies* 24 (1994): 57–99. In many cases exemplary stories that had simply been shown as figure scenes in the Han period were provided with settings of mountains, plants and trees. Eugene Wang, "Coffins and Confucianism—The Northern Wei Sarcophagus in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts," *Oriental Art* June 1999, 56–64. Tang tombs would have ensured an open space for the tomb occupant where the seasons might be enjoyed, as in the tomb of Wei Hao 韋浩 (buried 708) at Chang'an Xian. *Shaanxi xinchutu Tangmu bihua* (Chongqing, 1998), 68–73.

¹¹⁰ John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford, 2000), see especially Books 1–3, 59–115. W. Allen Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*, vol. 2, 111–12. Roel Sterckx in *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China* (Albany, 2002), 65, shows that an earlier reference is found in the *Shijing*.

¹¹¹ Tamura Jitsuzo, *Keiryō no hekiga: kaiga, chōshoku, tōji* (Kyoto, 1977), fig. 38.

¹¹² Ogawa Hiromitsu, "Bihuazhong de 'shijia' ji qi fangxiangxing," *Yishuxue* 1988.4, 275–99; Liu Daochun, *Sheng chao minghua ping*, in *Yishu shangjian xuanzhen wuzhi* (Taipei, 1974), *juan* 3:2. See also *Yizhou minghualu* in Yu Anlan, *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), vol. 6, *juan* 1: 13–16.

¹¹³ Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, in Yu Anlan, *Huashi congshu*, for landscapes of the four seasons, see *juan* 2, 12, 23, *juan* 3, 36, 37, 38, 51, 52, 54, 56; for birds and flowers of the four seasons see *juan* 2, 20, 21, 24, 29, 57, 60, 66. Some of the references are to *shan chuan* rather than to *shan shui*.

Jin tombs deployed painted flower vases. Such profusion of flower images in tombs from the eleventh century suggests that paintings of flowers and birds were widely popular in daily life.¹¹⁴

Bird and flower paintings and ornaments have usually been treated as belonging to an independent category, distinct from say mountain painting. But in fact both categories arise out of the systematic cosmos described above. When used in a room, such as the front chamber of Wang Chuzhi's tomb, I argue that the birds and flowers, no less than the stars, sun and moon, the zodiac figures and the mountain screen contributed to a universe.

3.3 Correlative Cosmology and the Human Dimension

The orders of Heaven and Earth were always seen as being closely tied to human society. The Zhou had first introduced the notion of Heaven as legitimising government. During the Warring States period, discussion about the ways in which Heaven would recognise a sage, a good ruler and an upright man (the *junzi*) developed apace. But it was always easier to suggest what would happen if the ruler did not follow the correct path:

If one [i.e. the ruler] goes against Heaven and violates things, then the sun and the moon will be feeble and eclipsed, the five planets will deviate from their courses, the four seasons encroach upon one another, the day will be dark and the night will be light, mountains will collapse and rivers will dry up, and there will be thunder in winter and frost in summer.¹¹⁵

As the search for a definition of a sage and a good ruler became ever more pressing, people looked for concrete, physical signs. They found them in moderation in dress and possessions, as described in *Zuozhuan* with reference to Duke Huan:

His gem-mats, and his scabbard, with its ornaments above and below; his belt, with its descending ends; the streamers of his flags and the ornaments at his horses' breasts, these illustrate his attention to regular degree of rank (*du* 度). The flames, the dragon, the axes and the symbols of distinction represented on his robes, these illustrate the elegance of his taste. The five colours laid on in accordance with the appearance of nature, these illustrate with what propriety his articles are made.¹¹⁶

During the third century this preoccupation was given a systematic form in keeping with the correlative framework.

The *Lüshi chunqiu* is the one of the earliest texts to emphasise the importance of making dress and artefacts in line with the patterns of the cosmos. It says that, in the first month of spring:

The Son of Heaven resides in the left apartment of the Green Yang brightness side of the Hall of Light [*Ming Tang*]. He rides a chariot with *luan* 鸞 phoenix

¹¹⁴ Embroidered textiles of the Liao and Jin period reproduce exactly the same combinations seen in screen painting and tomb decoration, see Feng Zhao, *Treasures in Silk* (Hong Kong, 1999), no. 05.01.

¹¹⁵ Griet Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An's Claim to Moral Authority* (Albany, 2001), 112.

¹¹⁶ Legge, *The Chinese Classics: Volume V, The Ch'un Tsew with The Tso Chuen*, 40.

bells, pulled by grey-green dragon-horses and bearing green streamers. He is clothed in green robes and wears green jade ornaments. He eats millet accompanied by mutton. His vessels are carved with openwork and are thus porous.¹¹⁷

The *Lüshi chunqiu* was followed by the *Yue ling* in the *Liji* and the *Baihutong*, all of which pay similar attention to the way in which the ruler was clothed and to the ornaments and chariots he used. This conforms to the view that the styles and colours of dress, caps and banners served as ways of realising a cosmological structure in ritual performance.

Early texts do not always give clear instructions about what was to be worn. Indeed, during the reign of the Han Emperor Ming (AD 58–75), the exact patterns of embroidery on robes were hotly debated. The Emperor pressed for twelve designs or patterns on his robe. Thereupon ensued a controversy, because the *Liji* speaks of five patterns and the *Zhouli* of nine patterns, both numbers closely linked to the cosmological geometry described above. Although we have no knowledge of what these motifs might have looked like, we see that the various numbers attached to them were significant, being those of the fundamental divisions of time and space. The late Han history, the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (compiled by Sima Biao [c. AD 240—c. 306]), followed by Fan Ye (398–445) indicates, moreover, that the twelve designs included “The sun; the moon; the constellations; the mountains; the dragon; the flowers and birds; these they painted. The cups; the aquatic grass; fire; grains of rice; the hatchet; the ornamental character; these they embroidered.”¹¹⁸ What is obvious from these comments is that the content of the designs related to the phenomena of the Heavens and the Earth and of the mountains that linked them. Similarly the *Hou Han shu* also lists cap decorations, some of which, likewise, refer to such cosmological features e.g. the Cap that Communicates with Heaven and the Cap for High Mountains.

In tombs, the ordering of people through dress and hierarchy appears in a variety of contexts. Special attention was always paid to number. Some tombs show numbers of chariots, most particularly in the Han, and these almost certainly indicated rank. The tomb of the Imperial princes might hold chariots and carts used in life, but lesser tombs lower down the hierarchy were supplied with such vehicles in carved stone images or wall paintings.¹¹⁹ Pictures showing visitors paying respect to the tomb occupant were other means by which rank was expressed, ranging from individuals bearing presents in the pair of highly decorated tombs at Mi Xian 密縣 in Henan province, to the kneeling figures in the much later Han tomb at Yi’nan 沂南 in Shandong province.¹²⁰ In the painted tombs of the sixth to eighth centuries AD, processions of attendants on foot and mounted provided similar support of status, as

¹¹⁷ Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 61.

¹¹⁸ B. J. Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of the Later Han: Their Authors, Sources, Contents and Place in Chinese History* (Leiden, 1990), 235.

¹¹⁹ For references to chariots within tombs, both real chariots and representations, see Jessica Rawson, “Eternal Palaces of the Western Han: A New View of the Universe,” 11; *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, vol. 1, fig. 126; see also Wu Hung, “Where Are They Going? Where Did They Come From? – Hearse and ‘Soul-carriage’ in Han dynasty Tomb Art,” *Oriental Art* June 1998, 22–31.

¹²⁰ *Mixian Dahuting Han mu*, 43–49; Xin Lixiang, *Handai huaxiangshi zonghe yanjiu* (Beijing, 2000), 249–52, *Yi’nan gu huaxiangshi mu fajue baogao* (Nanjing, 1956).

did rows of weapons set up in racks. Where we have much less ostentatious tombs, as in the case of Wang Chuzhi, we see rank provided by his official hat, placed in a side niche to the principal chamber.¹²¹ In all such situations official representation of rank was part of the ordering of the cosmos.

While number and degree were some of the basic components of correlative cosmology, other aspects were established by relating the human and the natural world. In keeping with the concern with birds and flowers described in the previous section, we find that these are also said to have played a role in dress at a relatively early period in Chinese history. As noted by Charles Hartman, "the *Zuozhuan*, under the year 525 BC, records that Shao Hao 少皞, a legendary sovereign, named the offices of government after birds."¹²² A number of texts report the supposed use of birds as emblems to signify official rank. In a debate in the seventh century AD concerned with the emblems proper to officials, one, Yang Jiong 楊炯 (650–c. 694), notes that hawks might be used to designate Ministers.¹²³

The close links between Heaven, Earth and humans were also expressed in other related terms. Many analogies were developed that linked people and the natural world. Comparisons between mountains and sages had been current in many Warring States texts. Such imagery lies behind the use of mountains as settings for eminent men. One such example is seen in Wang Chuzhi's tomb. Here his epitaph tablet and cover were placed in front of the screen painted with the landscape (fig. 14). Wang was in effect present by means of his epitaph and titles. His status was further enhanced by the comparison with the mountains behind him.

Other frequent analogies with birds and flowers had their origins in the poems of the ancient compilations of poetry, the *Shijing* and the *Chuci* 楚辭.¹²⁴ These provided many examples in which human affairs and qualities were set alongside description of the natural world.¹²⁵ The single greatest source of such analogies and metaphors arose out of the use of flowers and birds of the seasons. The peony was chosen to present abundance of rank and wealth by analogy with its lavish, full summer flowering. The prunus, also, flowering at the cusp between winter and spring, was, for its seasonal role, taken to exemplify the fortunes of the scholar and official in the face of difficulties.¹²⁶ Likewise pine trees that are so evident in the autumn and winter scenes at the Qingling present the roles of wisdom and endurance in age.¹²⁷ As Charles Hartman and Maggie Bickford have shown, such analogies were developed and complicated by a web of literary works that exploited the notion that Heaven and Earth and man were inextricably linked.

¹²¹ *Wudai Wang Chuzhi mu*, colour pl. 18.

¹²² Charles Hartman, "Literary and Visual Interactions in Lo Chih-ch'uan's *Crows in Old Trees*," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 28 (1993), 129–67.

¹²³ Charles Hartman, "Chinese Hawks, an Untitled Portrait," unpublished paper presented to the meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, March 25th 1994.

¹²⁴ Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton, 1987), chapter 2.

¹²⁵ Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World* (Madison, 1985); Kiyohiko Munakata, "Concepts of *Lei* and *Kan-lei* in Early Chinese Art Theory," 105–31; Haun Saussy, *The Problem of the Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford, 1993).

¹²⁶ The seminal work is Maggie Bickford, *Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar Painting Genre*.

¹²⁷ Charles Hartman, "Literary and Visual Interactions in Lo Chih-ch'uan's *Crows in Old Trees*" is a fund of information on analogies employing birds and trees.

These analogies were powerful precisely because they exploited natural phenomena made prominent and given value by the prevalent conceptions of the cosmos. Further, they were supported by a whole range of correlations that rested on the view that the universe was an integrated whole. Analogy greatly enriched the meanings and associations of all the major elements discussed, the constellations, the mountains, and animals, birds and flowers.¹²⁸ This dense network of meanings was one of the conditions that ensured the continuing development over many hundreds of years of this subject matter for paintings and for ornament.

4. Omens and Auspiciousness

Alongside the stable categories of the phenomena of Heaven and Earth just described, other much more capricious and varied features of the universe could manifest themselves: coloured clouds, comets and meteors, unexpected conjunctions of planets, strange beasts with wings or unusual colouring and disturbances in the patterns of nature. Dragons were probably the most important of all such phenomena, whose powers through their painted images over many centuries were mentioned at the beginning of the paper. These unexpected phenomena had to be carefully observed and recorded. By this route the intentions of Heaven could be recognised. The ancient Chinese developed whole schools to interpret portents as the "responses" that Heaven provided in what were called *xiangrui* 祥瑞, that is, auspicious images, or *ruiying* 瑞應, auspicious responses.

Court poems recorded in the *Han shu*, give descriptions of a heavenly horse as manifestation of Heaven's approval.¹²⁹ Portents also appear in the images from the ceiling slabs attributed to the late Han period Wu Liang shrine in Shandong province.¹³⁰ Other strange animals occur in many Han and later tombs. If, as suggested, tombs provided what they depicted, these would certainly only have been included if their presence was thought to be benign. Many creatures are horned, as these horns seem to have implied the capacity to drive away demons.¹³¹

Auspicious omens are rendered in lively images in the tomb at Jiuquan, described above. Here a heavenly horse and a deer are striking examples, whose source in the Heavens is obvious from their presence amid clouds above the earth (fig. 11d, e).¹³² Auspicious clouds also appear in many of the tombs mentioned. The Western Han tomb at Xi'an displays a pattern in blue lines that presumably represents auspicious vapours (fig. 9), and, in the tomb at Jiuquan, these are vividly coloured with red outlines. Clouds and creatures were automatically incorporated in ornament.¹³³

¹²⁸ Considerable attention has been paid to political meanings, but many of the associations are simply auspicious, see James Cahill, *Three Alternative Histories of Chinese Painting* (St. Louis, 1988), 29–31; Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China, the Subtle Art of Dissent* (Cambridge, 2000).

¹²⁹ Martin Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien*, Sinologica Coloniensia, vol. 19 (Stuttgart, 1997), 235.

¹³⁰ Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Art* (Stanford, 1989), 233–45.

¹³¹ *Nanyang Han huaxiangshi* (Beijing, 1990), no. 215.

¹³² In addition, note the immortal represented among the clouds of the tomb at Jiuquan, *Wenwu* 1979.6, pl. 3:1. The clothes are similar to those of the musicians or dancers, indicating that the person wafted through the air is, perhaps, a human being who has achieved non-death.

¹³³ Wu Hung, "The Sanpan Shan Chariot Ornament and the Xiangrui Design in Western Han Art," *Archives of Asian Art* 37 (1984): 38–59.

One of the most obvious examples of an auspicious creature is the crane. Cranes and clouds appear in many tomb ceiling paintings, as indeed they do on the upper walls of the tomb of Wang Chuzhi, already mentioned (fig. 15). These examples are by no means the earliest in date. Similar designs are present on the ceiling of the early eighth century tomb of the Princess Yongtai 永泰¹³⁴ and they can even be discerned in the ceiling of the late Western Han tomb at Xi'an, although they are not reproduced in the drawing illustrated here.¹³⁵ Paintings of cranes also appear in a garden setting in Tang tombs. Other examples occur in Liao tombs at Xuanhua 宣化 near Beijing (fig. 18).¹³⁶

These elegant birds were also depicted on scroll and screen paintings, as accounts of auspicious events, as in the Song period painting of *Auspicious Cranes* attributed to the Emperor Huizong (AD 1101–1125). This famous work records the sighting of cranes over the palace gates. If we follow the thesis that realistic paintings have the effects of their subjects, this painting, as much as the real cranes, would have had auspicious potential.¹³⁷ One specific sighting could be used repetitively by preserving it permanently in this way.

In an eleventh to twelfth century tomb at Dengfeng 登封 in Henan province, paintings of cranes match the suggestion made here that tombs and buildings were painted with subjects to realise good outcomes in the future, in this case the future of the afterlife (fig. 19a). Two paintings of cranes (fig. 19b) and one of peacocks accompany two other pictures with human figures in them. One of these shows an individual leading an ox approaching what appears to be a sage sitting in front of a steep hillside with a spouting waterfall in the background. The other shows the man who led the ox now rising, as if on a strong current of air (fig. 19c). It is not clear which of the two figures presents the tomb occupant. But the message is obvious. A future life, with suitable contemplation, in a landscape away from official duties, would enable the tomb occupant to encounter immortals, or to become one.¹³⁸ For from Han period texts and mirror inscriptions, we learn that immortals could ride on the air.¹³⁹ And this tomb recalls a figure rising of the wind in the tomb at Jiuquan (fig. 11d). Religious adepts, often given the general name of Daoists, aspired to become immortal and to vanish into the upper air by following a regime of exercise and diet. In this context, it would seem that the cranes may have been intended to encourage the outcome wished for and promised in the other two paintings. Here, we see one way in which the concern with achieving a spiritual existence had continued to be joined with imagery taken from aspects of the systematic cosmos.

The search for a good outcome was also expressed in words. Characters present-

¹³⁴ See *Wenwu* 1964.1: 7–33, fig. 9.

¹³⁵ *Xi'an Jiaotong Daxue Xi Han bihuamu*, colour pls. 1,2. A number of records of the role of cranes going back to the late Western Han appear in the histories. Recently crane figures in bronze have been discovered near the tomb of Qing Shihuangdi (*Kaogu* 2000.7, 12–14, pl. 5:1).

¹³⁶ *Xuanhua Liaomu bishua* (Beijing, 2001), nos. 12, 15, 16, 31, 33.

¹³⁷ Peter Sturman, "Cranes above Kaifeng: The Auspicious Image at the Court of Huizong," *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990): 33–68.

¹³⁸ It is not entirely clear which of the two individuals refers to the tomb occupant. The scenes could depict one of several stories that suggest that the ox indicates a retreat from the hurly burly of official life and a search for enlightenment.

¹³⁹ Loewe, *Ways to Paradise*, 83–84, 192–203.

ing auspicious sentiments were employed on roof tile ends from at least the Han period and probably earlier. Much use was also made of the play of words. Good wishes could be embodied in designs that were dependent on the viewer understanding a word play. As Bai Qianshen 白謙慎 has discussed, two principal types were used.¹⁴⁰ The first deploys a homophone, as when ornament of bats, pronounced *fu* 蝠, is used to decorate robes and porcelain with the intention of ensuring happiness also pronounced *fu* 福.¹⁴¹ Bai has discussed several Han period examples, including a seal carved as three goats. This rebus which may be read as *sanyang* 三羊 (literally three goats) is, in Bai's interpretation, related to the phrase *sanyang jiaotai* 三陽交泰, "three positive principals create peace," where the homophone *yang* 羊, refers to the *yang* 陽 principle or force.¹⁴²

The homonyms that were favoured were those that referred to creatures of the natural world, developing the categories already established by paintings and ornament of the four seasons, described above.¹⁴³ The other type of word play, represented for example by depictions of combinations of animals, flowers or flowers and birds with complex associations, often depended upon a long literary tradition. Charles Hartman has provided an elegant example in his discussion of the Golden Pheasant, and he describes the texts that provide the basis for the association of the pheasant with constancy and firmness.¹⁴⁴ Thus interest in portents and auspicious phenomena added yet another layer to the development of the subject matter of paintings and design.

¹⁴⁰ Qianshen Bai, "Image as Word: A Study of Rebus Play in Song Painting (960–1279)," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 34 (1999): 57–72.

¹⁴¹ Louise Cort and Jan Stuart with a contribution from Laurence Chi-sing Tan, *Joined Colours: Decoration and Meaning in Chinese Porcelain. Ceramics from Collectors in the Min Chiu Society, Hong Kong* (Washington and Hong Kong, 1993), front cover.

¹⁴² Bickford in an analysis ranging over a larger group of material interprets the reference as *san yang kai Tai* 三陽開泰. Maggie Bickford, "Three Rams and Three Friends: The Working Lives of Chinese Auspicious Motifs," *Asia Major*, third series, vol. 12, pt. 1 (1999), 127–59.

¹⁴³ Some examples are illustrated by Terese Tse Bartholomew, "Botanical Puns in Chinese Art from the Collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco," *Oriental Arts* September 1985, 18–34.

¹⁴⁴ From as early as Han times the pheasant was known for two characteristics: its refusal to be enticed by food and the difficulty of rearing it in captivity. In Han literature these qualities were equated with the upright and loyal official who could not be bribed. Over the centuries down to the Tang, this loyalty came to be interpreted as marital fidelity. Hartman demonstrates the long life of this theme by the example of a Song period painting by an unknown artist in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Its subject matter combines of a pair of magpies, standard symbols of happiness, with a pair of pheasants, as symbols of marital fidelity beneath a pine tree suggestive of along life. Such a painting would, in all probability, have been a gift for a wedding or similar occasion. Charles Hartman, "Literary and Visual Interactions in Lo Chih-ch'uan's *Crows in Old Trees*" 146–49; see p.148 for the painting.

Conclusion

The central hypothesis realised here is that a close link can be established between the intellectual framework and the physical, man-made world of the ancient Chinese. This argument has been developed with respect to a number of areas. First, the link between the intellectual and the physical was demonstrated by contrasting belief in a cosmos controlled by spirits and ancestors, mediated by offerings in fine bronzes, with notions of a systematic or correlative cosmos, whose framework was presented in models and images in tombs and buildings. Such a change in the visual world fits with the development of a correlative cosmology from the fourth century BC. This transition was of major significance to the development of all Han and post-Han material culture.

The strength of the ideas supporting this cosmology was confirmed by an examination of some of the recurrent subject matter of tomb imagery from the Han Dynasty and later. It comprised the heavenly bodies, mountains and rivers and the birds and flowers of the seasons. These survive in tombs, but paintings in buildings are otherwise only known from texts that describe the works of artists from the 6th to the 12th centuries AD. Nonetheless, the texts reinforce the view that the cosmological framework was of considerable importance in determining the subject matter of some of the major Chinese traditions of paintings. The role of the cosmology is further evident in the concern with creatures and other phenomena that were described in texts as evidence of the will of Heaven-dragons, horned beasts, cloud formations, and auspicious fungi.

This paper has taken the view that wall and screen paintings of these subjects deployed for the dead and the living in periods up to at least the early Song (10th–11th century AD) were aspects of the enterprise to model the cosmos and so create auspicious spaces that were congruent with the universe. A concern with maintaining congruent imagery, starting no later than the Qin period, has continued down to the twentieth century. Just as the *Lüshi chunqiu* describes in the third century BC the appropriate banners and artefacts for each month, so much later in the Ming period (AD 1368–1644), Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 lists painting subjects appropriate for each month and for every festival of the year.¹⁴⁵

The subject matter of paintings also provided analogies and metaphors. Emperors were frequently shown in front of screens painted with dragons to emphasise their powers.¹⁴⁶ The concern with images as creating auspicious situations and not just reflecting them is here taken as another example of the strength of the cosmo-

¹⁴⁵ Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (London, 1997), 57–58.

¹⁴⁶ Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (London, 1996), 1–14.

logical scheme. Likewise the analogies developed on the basis of the same imagery equally fits the view that underlying the choice of subject matter is the correlative cosmology here described.

A further example of a preoccupation with a correlative universe was the widespread development of the same imagery for every sort of ornament. In architectural decoration, these subjects are seen as the motifs compiled in the Song period architectural manual, the *Yingzao fashi* 營造法式 (fig. 20), and in dress they occur on the robes of emperors, officials, and religious figures. In both we find the same repertory of the colours, the heavenly bodies,¹⁴⁷ the creatures of the directions and auspicious beasts of all categories, and the birds and flowers of the seasons.¹⁴⁸ Mountains appear too, in diagrammatic forms, in characters, as the sacred mountains of the directions and as mountains on the islands of the immortals amid turbulent seas.

When viewed in these terms, the motifs of what we call ornament (which are often too readily disregarded as imagery without content), can be seen as visible signs that were manipulated over time to refer to a framework that underpinned the ancient and medieval Chinese understanding of the world. The various images of sun and birds, waves and mountains on rank badges, for example, are not randomly assembled compositions, but carefully patterned to set their owners in relation to the cosmos as a whole. The same subject matter could be presented in fine paintings or as embroidery on magnificent robes, or as relatively cursorily painted blue decoration on porcelain. Paintings, textiles and decorated porcelain thus belonged to a single continuum. Of course, varied styles and levels of execution and distinctive associations accrued to the same subject matter in the different media and their separate contexts.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, the crane as a subject is a prime example of the ways in which paintings, seen as 'art', and embroidery, seen as 'ornament', belonged to a single integrated visual tradition.¹⁵⁰

What can be argued with respect to ancient China is equally true of the ancient and medieval Mediterranean world. There deity figures and the architecture, in which they were customarily set, provided the paradigm for the decoration of ritual objects, such as chalices and reliquaries, and of religious furnishings, such as pulpits and pews in churches of the Middle Ages.¹⁵¹ In later centuries also, figure subjects

¹⁴⁷ Beverley Jackson and David Hughes, *Ladder to the Clouds: Intrigue and Tradition in Chinese Rank* (Berkeley, 1999), 139–42.

¹⁴⁸ For cranes depicted on robes, see *Wenwu* 1978.4: 1–13, pl. 2; Stephen Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago, 2000), no. 51; for a silver flask, see *Wenwu* 2000.8: 4–20.

¹⁴⁹ This visual world remained in place so long as the assumptions about the universe that had fostered the development of the visual systems in the first place remain intact. But as international trade brought foreign artefacts to many areas, and interaction between diverse societies led to questioning of long-held assumptions, the visual systems of China and the West were, as the twentieth century has shown, undermined. If we wonder why the visual systems collapsed, it seems that we might look to the breakdown of the cosmological systems and note the ways that they caved in before the forces of what is termed modernity. New systems were at work and affected design, primary among these are scientific metaphors derived from engineering, biology and computer sciences, see Philip Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogy in Architecture and the Applied Arts* (Cambridge, 1979).

¹⁵⁰ Maggie Bickford has discussed this issue starting from the other end, so to speak. She has taken issue with the notion that paintings of the *Three Friends* should be seen as primarily a theme of the élite, see her study: Bickford, *Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar Painting Genre*.

¹⁵¹ Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Oxford, 1979), 176–79.

and mouldings of every sort embellished secular buildings, furniture and artefacts, such as candlesticks and coffee pots.¹⁵² We call these details ornament and disregard them. But consistency of ornament with the major works of religion and of the state seems to have been a necessary condition for a self-sustaining visual programme, and perhaps in Chinese terms, for a coherent society.

In the Mediterranean world, as in China, this coherence was provided by a highly integrated and systematic set of motifs linked with a system of ideas. Inter-related subjects in art and ornament in the Mediterranean world and in the Chinese one were integral to the ways in which the societies constructed and presented themselves and to the universes that they inhabited. Such parallels between China and the Mediterranean yet further support the thesis advanced here.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for comments from Robert Hamish, Lothar Ledderose, Julia Murray, and Michael Puett.

¹⁵² Michael Snodin and Maurice Howard, *Ornament: A Social History Since 1450* (New Haven and London, 1996), 59, and 88 illustrate domestic metalwork that exploits architectural forms.

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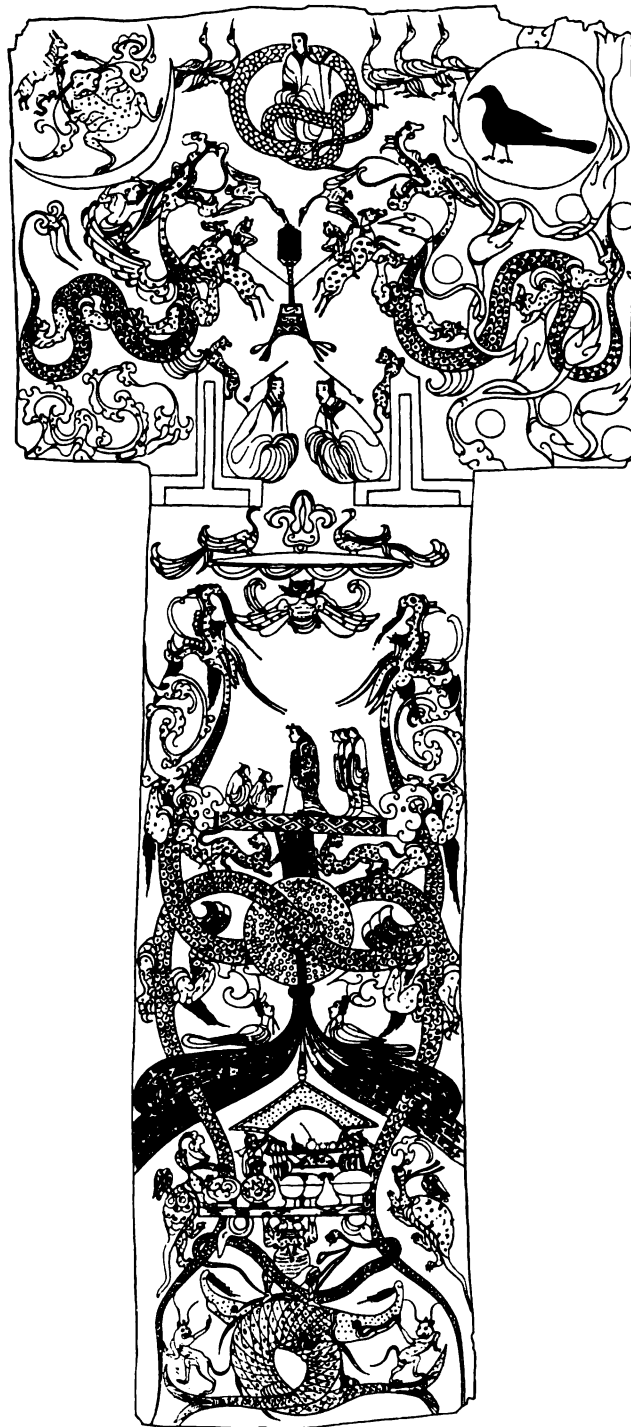
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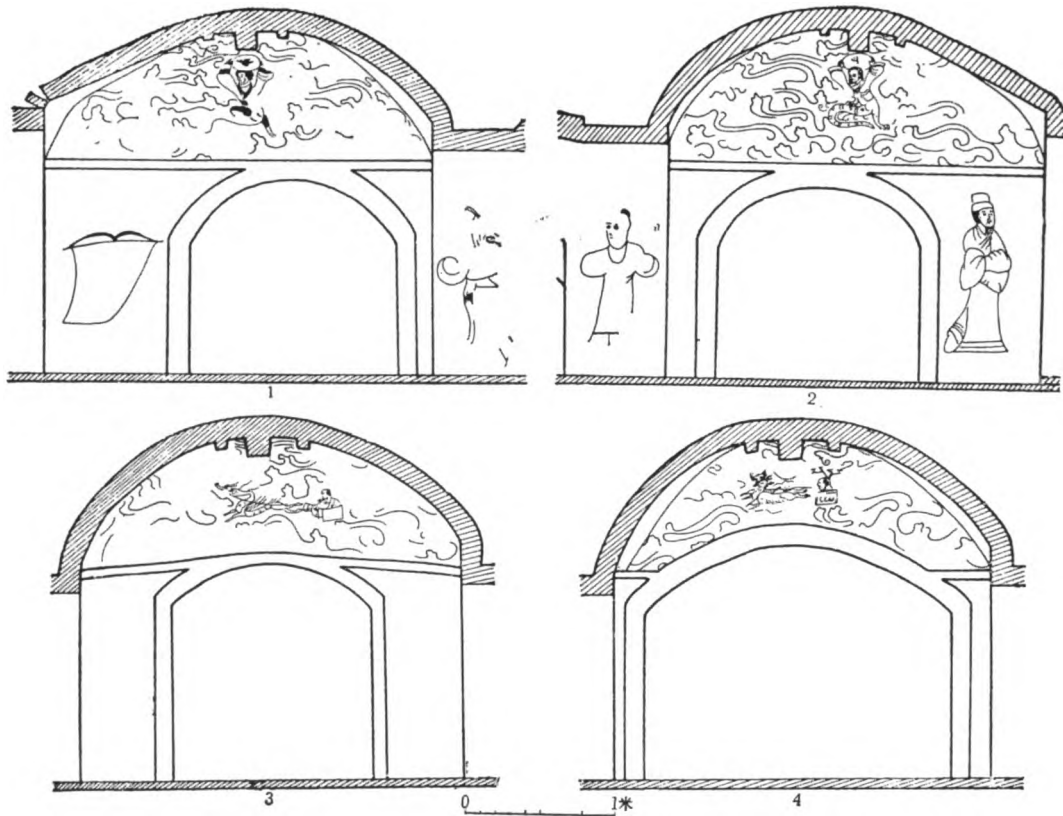
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图三八 彩绘帛画 (约 1/2)

Fig. 1.

Drawing of the banner found in tomb 1 at Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan province. Han dynasty, 2nd century BC. After *Changsha Mawangdui yi hao Han mu*, vol. 1, fig. 83.



图一〇 墓中室四壁剖面图

1.东壁 2.西壁 3.南壁 4.北壁

Fig. 2.

Drawing of the interior of a tomb at Luoyang, Henan province. Wang Mang period, 1st century AD. After *Kaogu* 1991.8, 721, fig. 10.

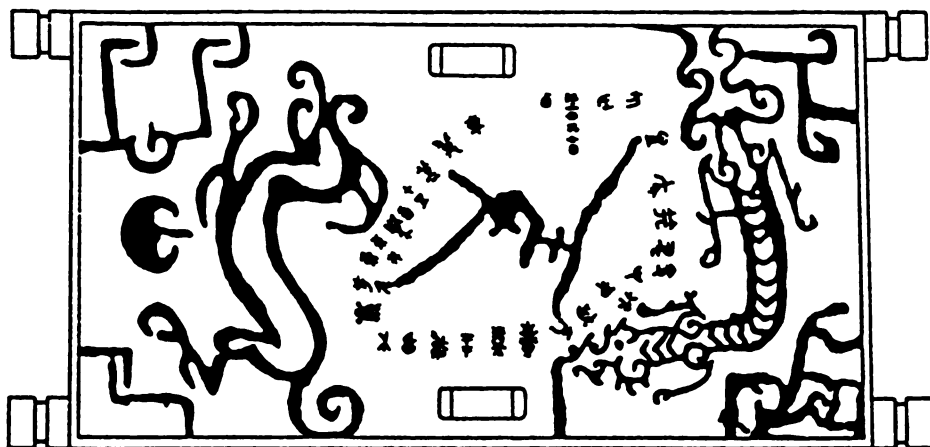


Fig. 3.

Drawing of the design on a clothes box from the tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng.
After Zeng Hou Yi mu, fig. 216.

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THE XINGDE TEXTS FROM MAWANGDUI

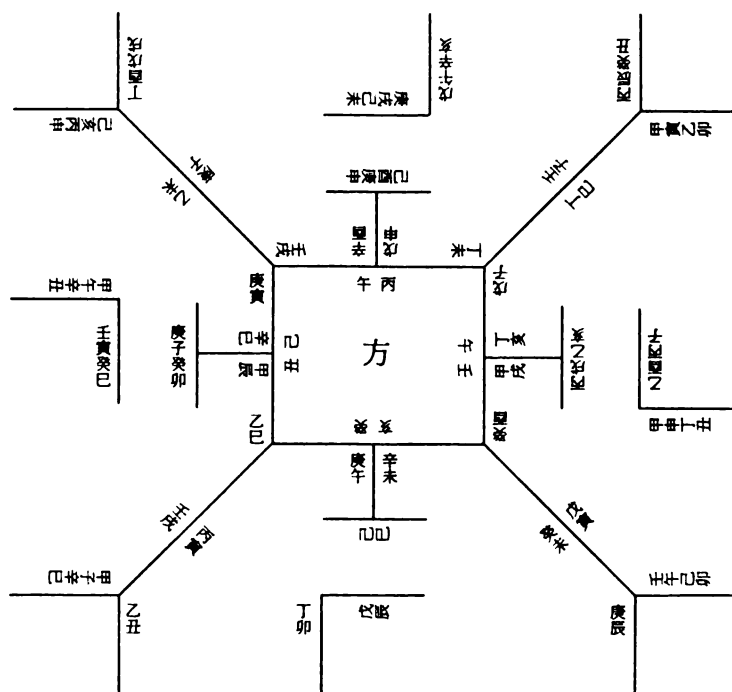
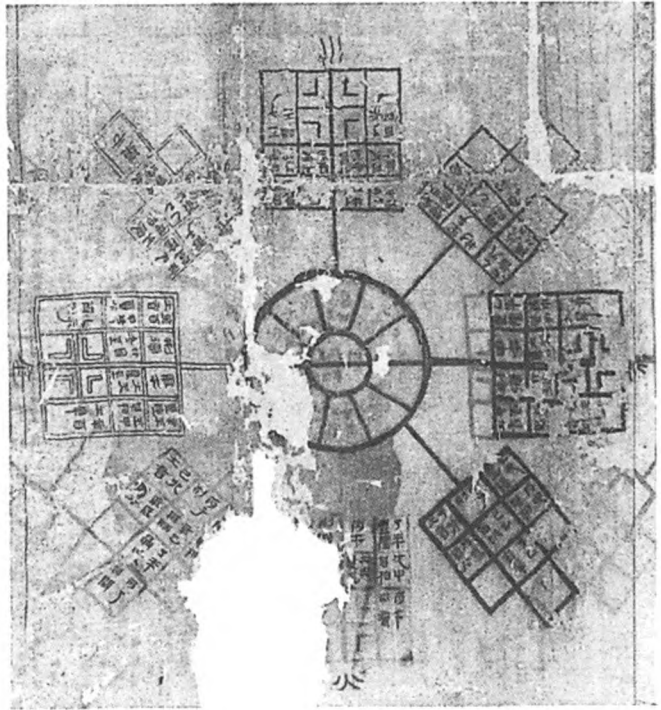


Fig. 4.

Drawing of the geometric diagram and characters representing the universe on a wooden board found at Yinwan in Jiangsu province. 1st century BC. After Marc Kalinowski, 'The Xingde Texts from Mawangdui', 144, fig. 10.

Fig. 5.
Drawing of the 'Nine-room
Palace Diagram' found at
Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan
province, 2nd century BC.
After Fu Juyou et al., *Mawang-
dui Hanmu wenwu*, 132-34.



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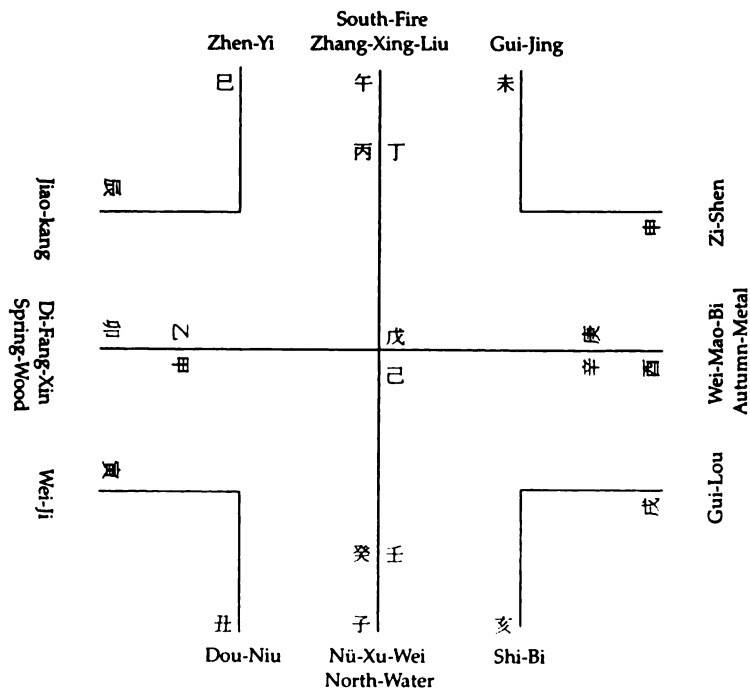


Fig. 6.
Drawing of the Cord Hook diagram from the Shashi manuscript. Third century BC.
After Marc Kalinowski, 'The *Xingde* Texts from Mawangdui', 139, fig. 6.



Fig. 7.
Rubbing of a bronze mirror
back with a TLV design.
Reign of Wang Mang, AD 9-25
(after Chen Peifen, *Shanghai
Bowuguan cang qingtong jing*,
no. 41.

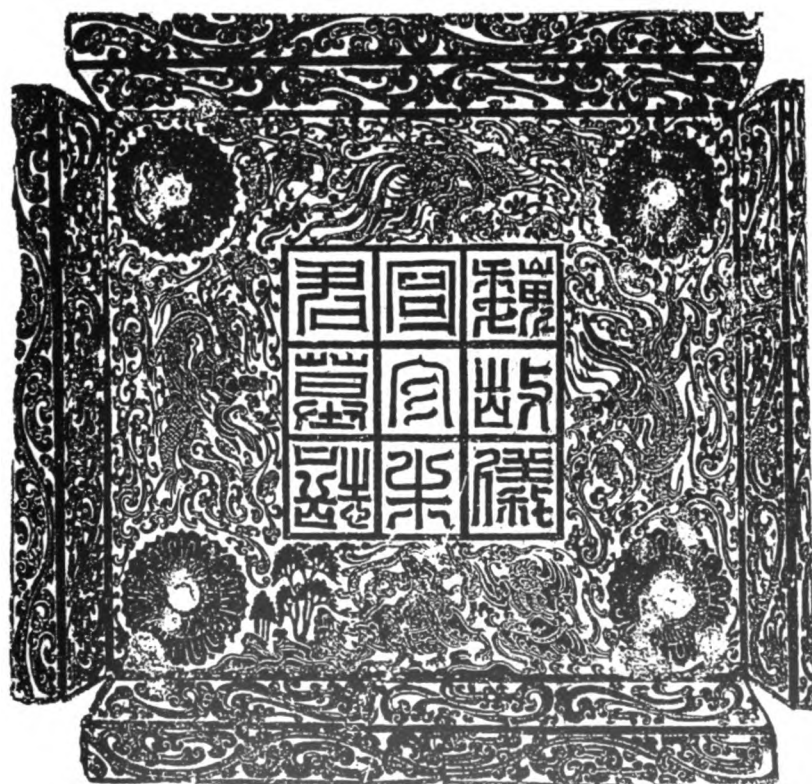


Fig. 8.
Rubbing of the epitaph
cover of Erzhu Xi
(AD 522). After *Zhong-
guo huaxiangshi quanji*,
vol. 8, no. 45.



Fig. 9.

Drawing showing the heavenly bodies on the painted ceiling of a tomb at Xi'an.
Western Han period, First century BC. After *Xi'an Jiaotong Daxue Xi Han bihua mu*, 25.



Fig. 10.

Rubbing of a carved tomb from Nanyang in Henan province showing the moon and a dragon surrounded by constellations of stars. Eastern Han period, 1st-2nd century AD. After *Nanyang liang Han huaxiangshi*, no. 270.

墓 室

壁画保存基本完好。彩绘技法有多种。壁画内容：

一、前室 顶部中心绘复辟莲花图案，下分五层，以赭石宽带为界栏。

头门壁在顶部，第一层，莲花图案以下，无壁画。第二层，四隅所表现的是天，都是祥瑞之物，上部各绘一阙

图八 高台寺壁画墓中壁画

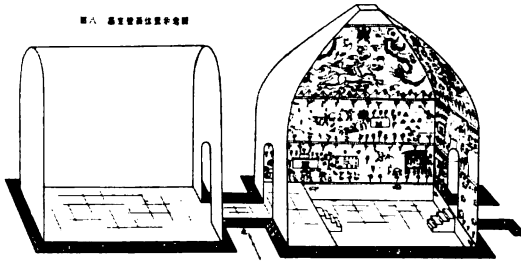
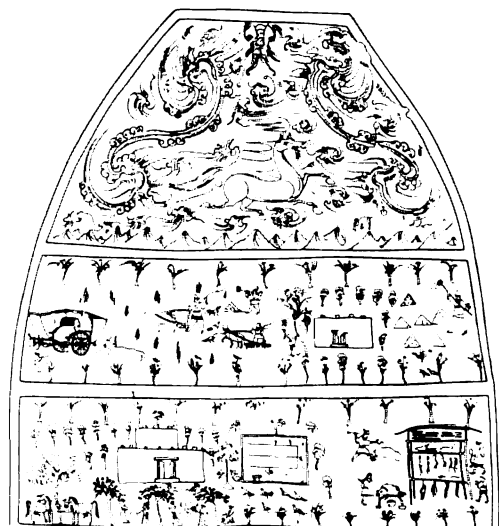
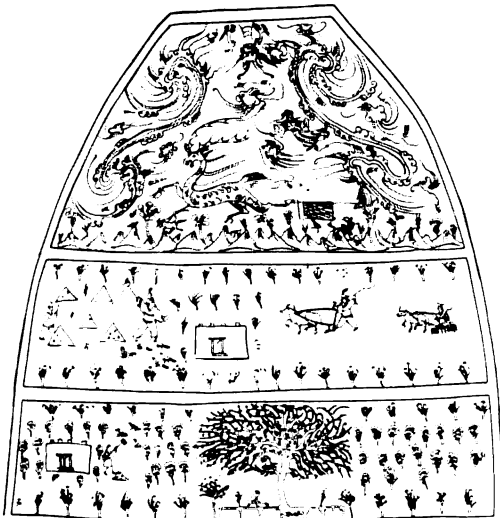
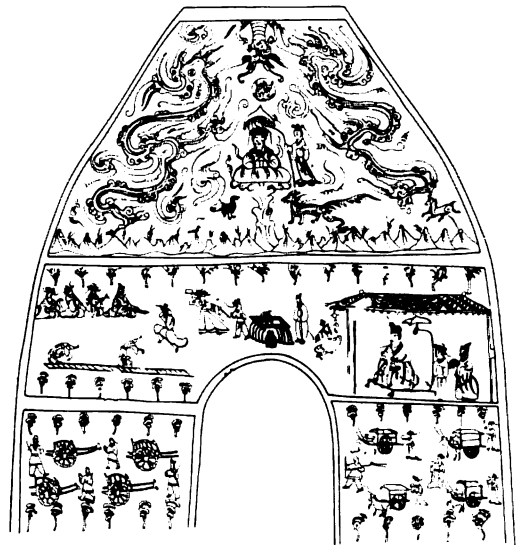
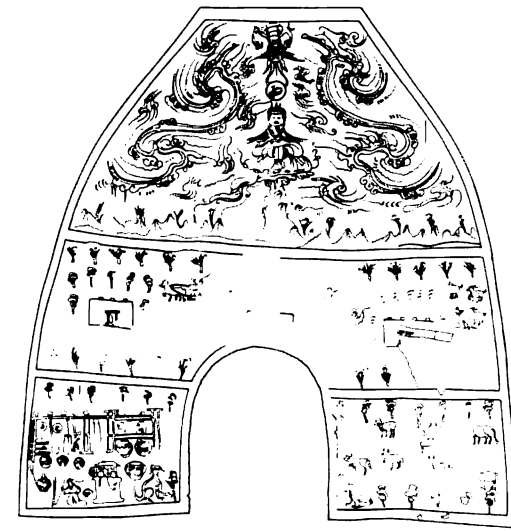


Fig. 11.

Drawing tomb 5 at Dingjiazha at Jiuquan in Gansu province, showing the whole tomb and the scenes painted on the four sides of the main chamber. Fourth to fifth century AD. After *Jiuquan Shiliuguo mu bihua*: a, Whole tomb; b, East side showing the Lord of the East; c, West side showing the Queen Mother of the West; d, South side showing a deer and an immortal in the heavens; e, North side showing a heavenly horse in the sky above the mountain range.



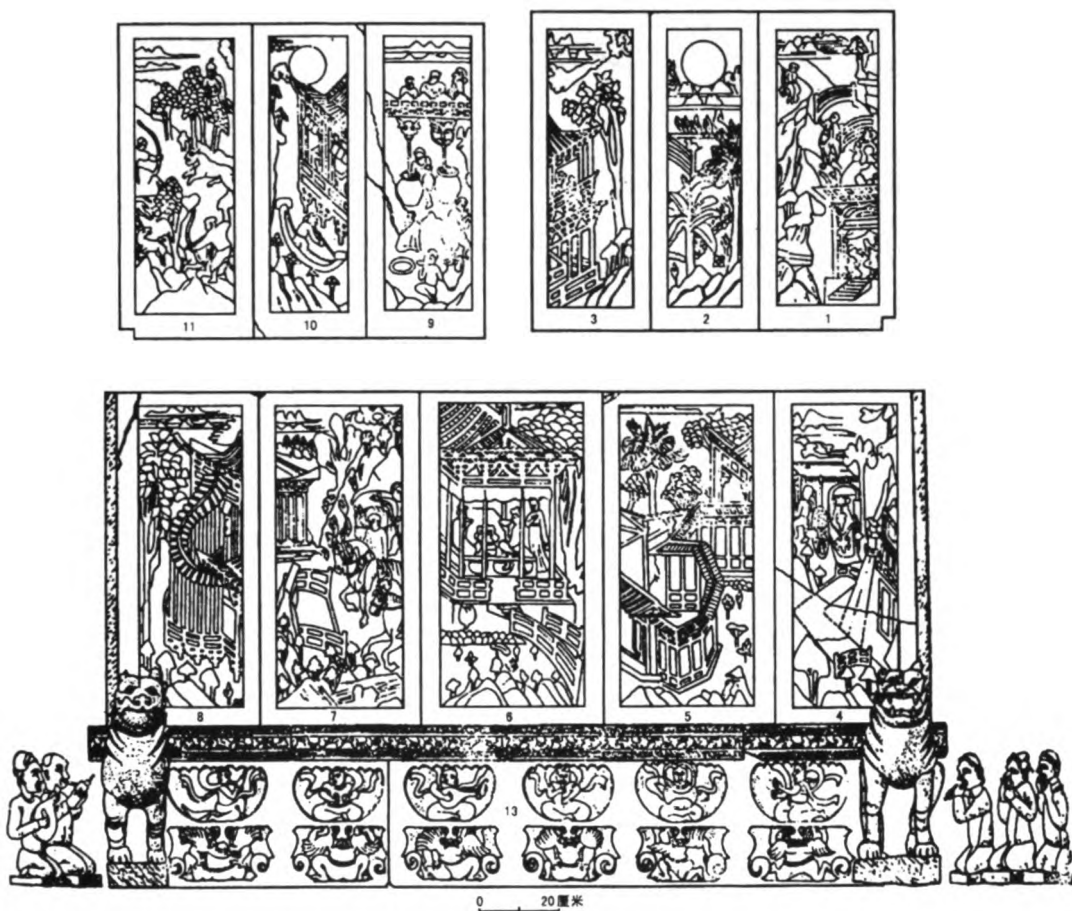
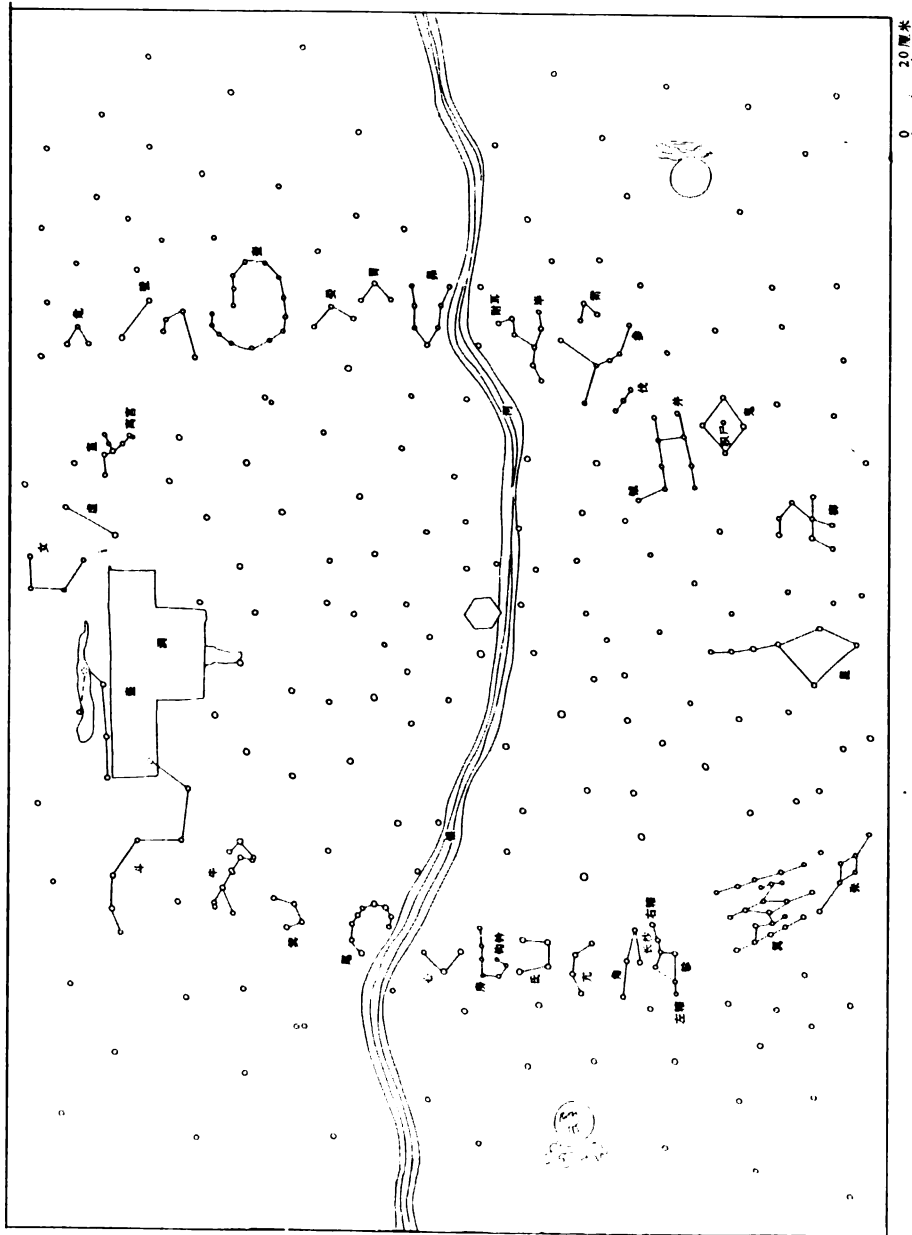


Fig. 12.

Drawing of the scenes on the stone screen surrounding a coffin bed from Gansu, Tianshui. Sui dynasty, early 7th century AD. After *Kaogu* 1992.1, 46-54, figs. 2, 3.



图八 前室顶部天象图摹本

Fig. 13.

Drawing of the ceiling of the tomb of Wang Chuzhi showing the stars, the lunar lodges, the sun and the moon and the Milky Way. After *Wudai Wang Chuzhi mu* (Beijing, 1998), fig. 8.



Fig. 14.

View of the front room of the tomb of the military governor, Wang Chuzhi (d. 923 AD), with a representation of a screen painted with a landscape on the rear wall. After *Wudai Wang Chuizhi mu*, pl. 13:2.



Fig. 15.

The west wall of the front room of Wang Chuzhi's tomb, showing screens decorated with flowers. After *Wudai Wang Chuzhi mu*, colour pl. 6.

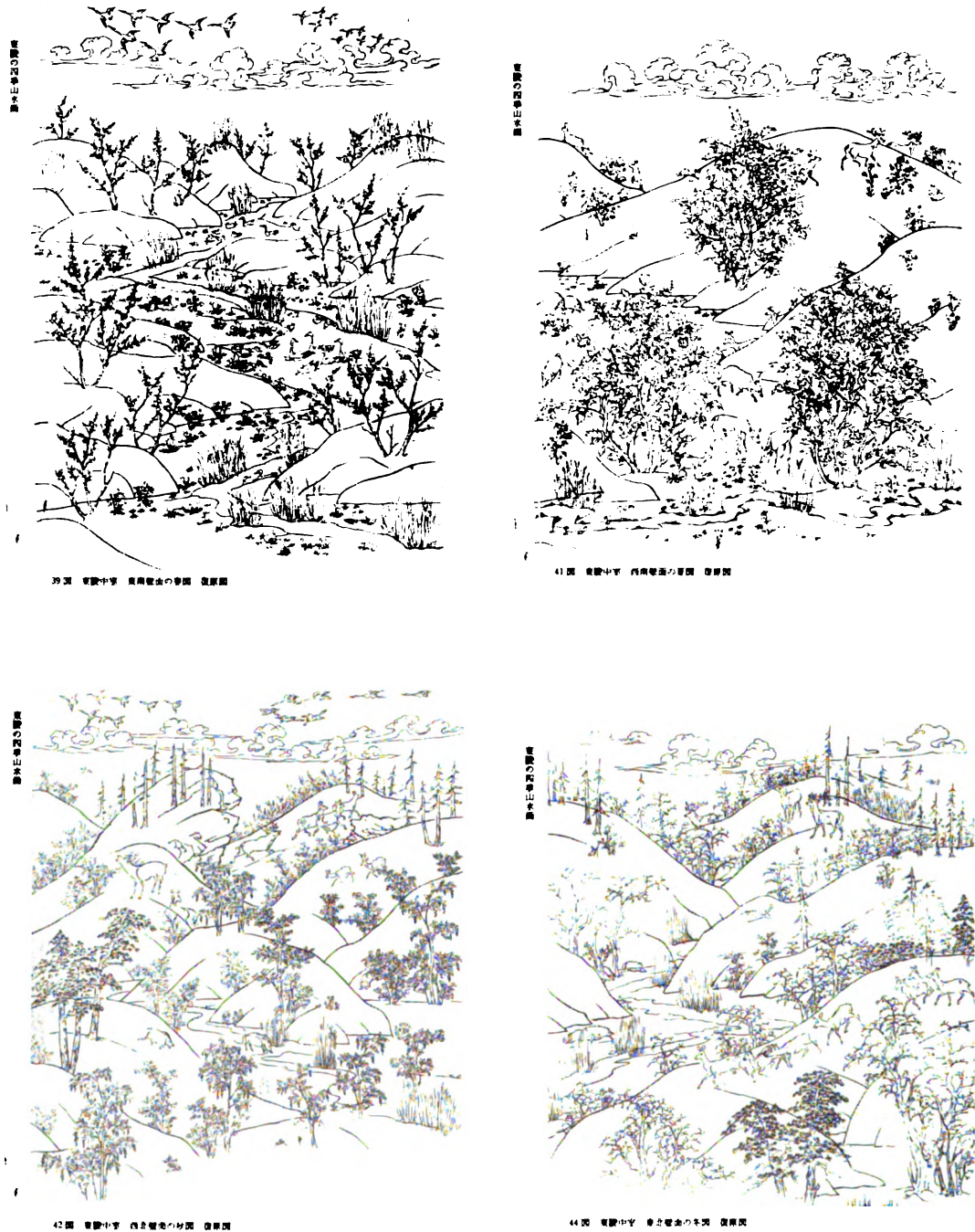


Fig. 16.
Wall paintings of the four seasons. From the Qingling. Liao dynasty 11th century AD.
After Tamura, *Keiryô no hekiga*.

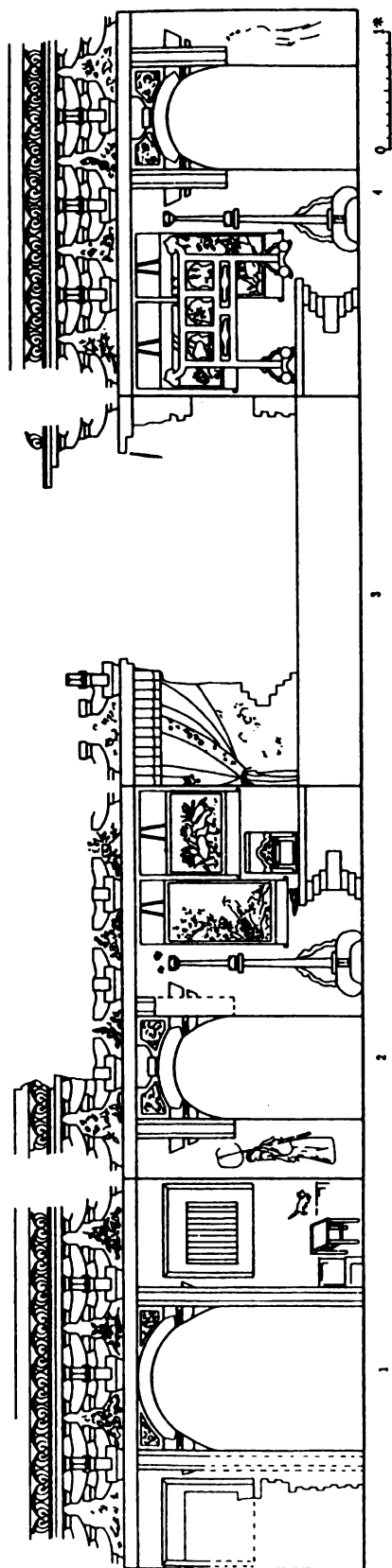


Fig. 17.
Drawing of the interior of a tomb showing screens and hanging scrolls displaying birds and flowers at Mangshan,
Luoyang, Henan province. Song period, early 12th century AD. After *Wenwu* 1992.12, 37-51, fig. 11.



Fig. 18.

Wall painting of a crane with bamboo and flowers, possibly prunus, on the west wall of the rear chamber of the tomb of Zhang Kuangzheng 張匡正 (d. 1058), at Xuanhua near Beijing. After *Xuanhua Liaomu*, pl. 15.

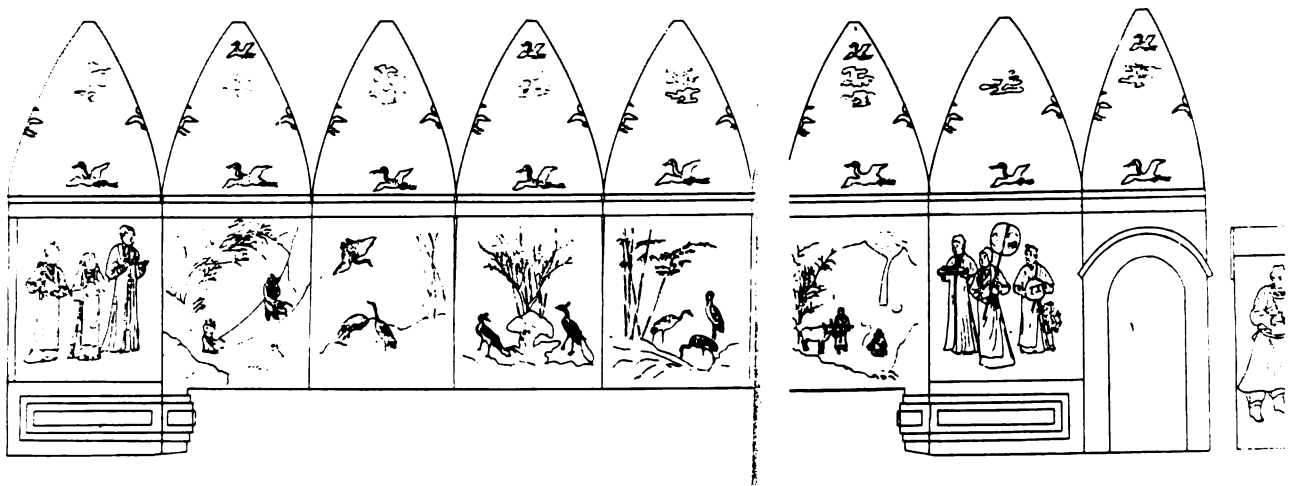


Fig. 19.

Drawing of the interior of a tomb at Dengfeng in Henan province, with three paintings of birds and plants at the centre and two paintings of scenes of two men meeting in a landscape either side.

The other paintings, at a quite different scale show servants. Song period, 12th century AD.

After *Wenwu* 1994.10, 4-9, fig. 3: a, Drawing of the wall paintings; b, Painting of cranes and bamboo; c, Painting showing a man rising on a stream of air, as if becoming an immortal.



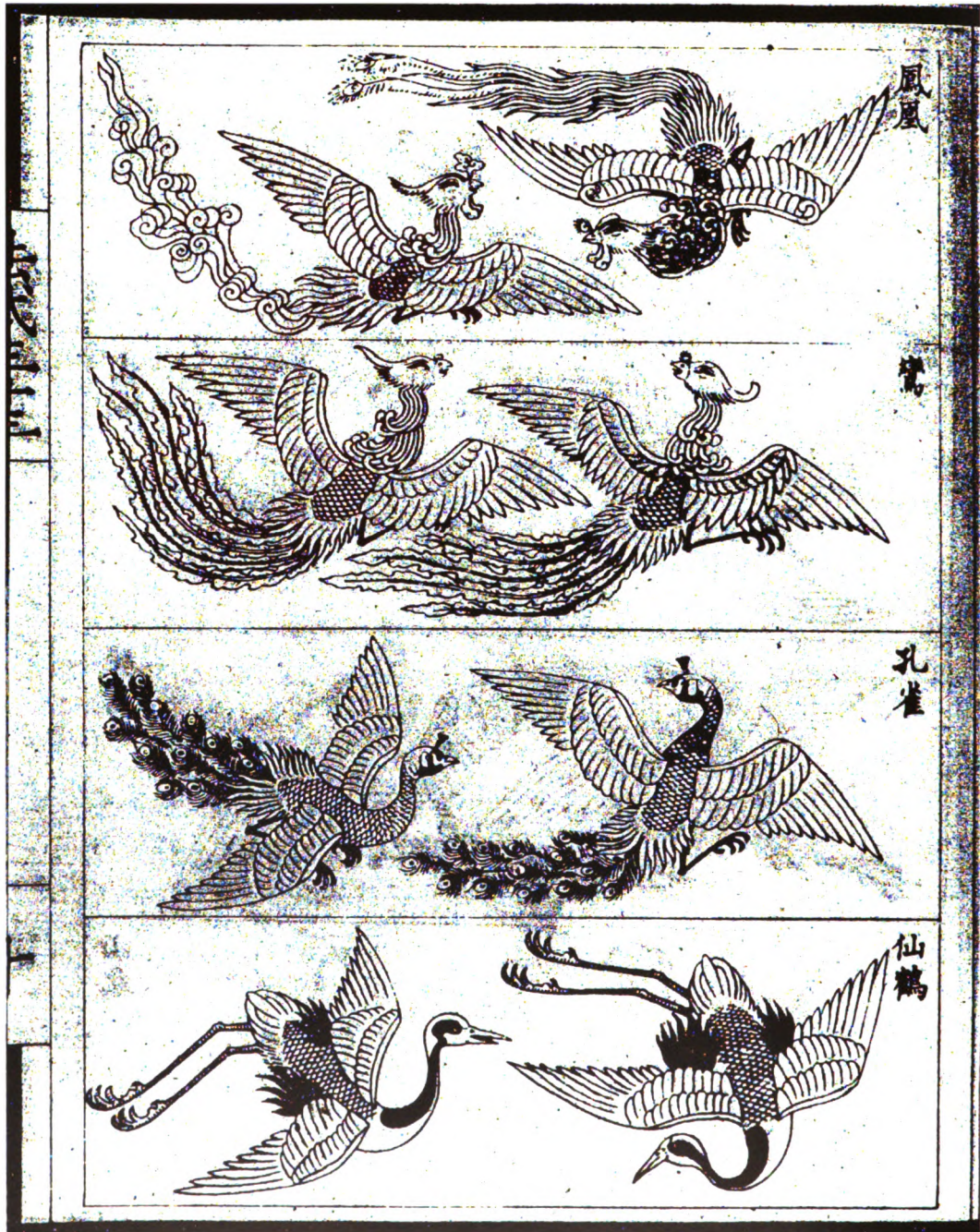


Fig. 20. Part I.
Figures of ornaments of flowers and creatures from a modern facsimile of
the Song dynasty architectural manual, *Yingzao fashi*.

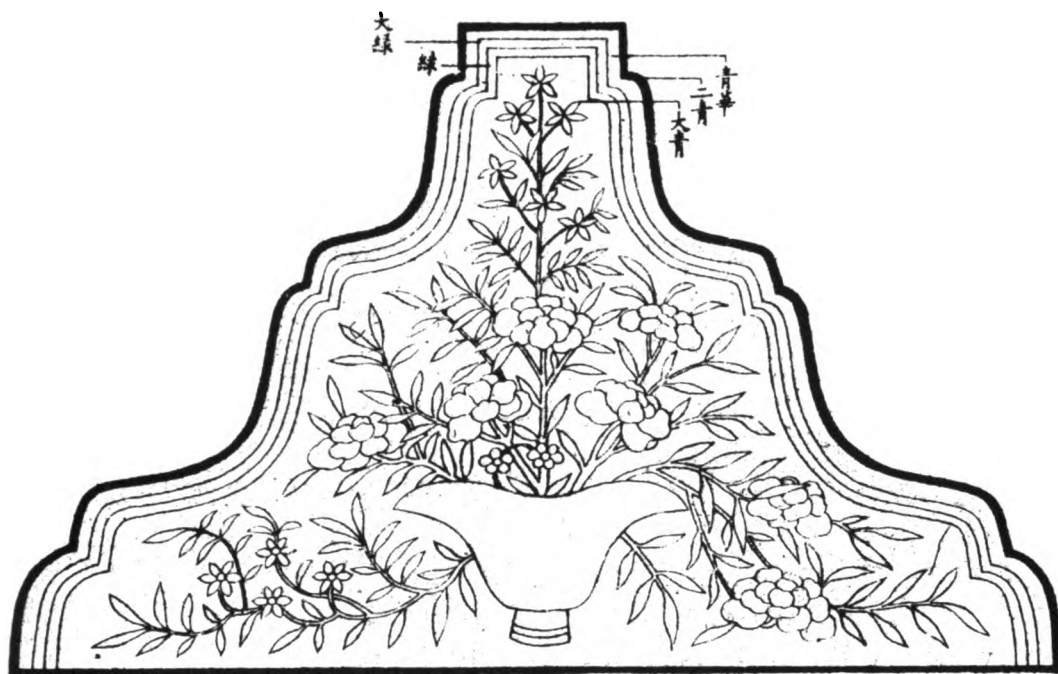


Fig. 20. Part II.

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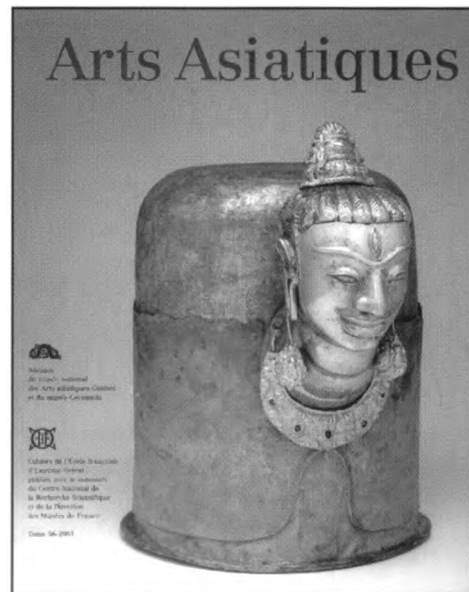
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The Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities

first appeared in 1929, the same year as the Museum opened in Stockholm. The journal has been published annually by the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities ever since. The founding editor was Johan Gunnar Andersson, founder of the Museum, and a scholar of East Asian archaeology known for his pathbreaking discoveries in East Asian prehistory. The other former editors are the famous Sinologist Bernhard Karlgren, who published generously and voluminously in the Bulletin, and Jan Wirgin, director emeritus of the MFEA. Many other Swedish and international scholars have contributed to the *BMFEA*, and helped establish it as important international venue of publication in Asian studies.

The *BMFEA* invites original manuscripts from scholars worldwide on all aspects of ancient and classical East Asia and adjacent regions, including archaeology, art, and architecture; history and philosophy; literature and linguistics; and related fields.

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The *BMFEA* primarily publishes articles in English, and occasionally in other European languages. Manuscripts are accepted for review in English, German, French, Japanese and Chinese. Article manuscripts for general issues are reviewed continuously, and there are also special thematic issues with separate manuscript deadlines (one is announced in this issue). All contributions are peer-reviewed. An electronic copy of articles, submitted together with publication-quality illustrations, is required for final accepted versions. Author's instructions will be sent on demand. E-mail correspondence is preferred. All manuscripts and enquiries should be sent to the *BMFEA* Editors (address on the previous page).

The present *BMFEA* issue, volume 72, is the first special-theme issue of the journal, "Reconsidering the Correlative Cosmology of Early China." We are pleased with the response, and hope the articles will provoke further debate, as well as further contributions.

BMFEA 73 (2001), to appear later this year, will present several articles dealing with issues in East Asian archaeology, including "Cities and Towns: The Control of Natural Resources in Early States" by Li Liu and Xingcan Chen.

BMFEA 74 (2002) is yet another special theme issue, "Orality-Inscription." Please see our separate *Call for Papers* (on the next page).

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For a special issue of the *BMFEA*, vol. 74, to be distributed in 2003

Call for papers: **Inscription — Orality**

The awesome powers of the literary traditions of ancient East Asia, as inscribed on bamboo and bone, bronze and stone, silk, paper or other media, or on the back of monsters rising from the rivers, have recently begun to be investigated in earnest. Also, linguistic communications such as those encountered in enactments of Rites, in statements and/or inscriptions made by the living in commemoration of the dead or in relation to deities, in poetic writings or song, etc., have increasingly come to be considered with an acute attention to the nature of the very *form* of their presentation, and what it can reveal beyond that most obvious dichotomy of the spoken and the written Word.

For this special issue we invite fresh, bold investigations and discussions of specific interdigitations of the oral and the inscribed in ancient East Asia. We hope for in-depth treatment of specific problems, informed by theoretical developments in the debates on orality versus inscription, writing and literacy, both inside and outside Asian studies. Articles may concern any part of ancient East Asia and adjacent areas within the scope of interest of the *BMFEA*. The editors do not place final restrictions on the subject, but suggest a range of possible topics:

- Interfaces of literacy and orality and transformative aspects of the use of Chinese writing in the region, including in the encounter with non-Chinese spoken or written traditions such as in Japan, Korea, or Vietnam
- Tacit or explicit ideological assumptions behind the Qin standardization of the Chinese script
- How literate was China before the Warring States Period? Just how were the early Chinese inscriptions influenced by the nature of their various media? What was their sociology?
- The relationship between the *Yijing* and the *Shijing*, which was dealt with by Arthur Waley in an early article in this journal. How can this relationship be considered in terms of orality vs. inscription, such as, in the light of the interrelationship between these works and the Zhou bronze inscriptions?
- The relationship between the specific nature of Chinese characters and their semantic value. Whereas there has been talk of an "interiorization of the alphabet in the Greek psyche," sinologists – after Ezra Pound, and despite Jacques Derrida – have generally avoided such discussions. Is there a "surplus of meaning" in the characters or is this an Occidental fantasy?
- The "inscription" of an important work or body of communications in or as a Canon. How do compilers and exegetes of different ideological persuasions deal with allegedly oral characteristics of a given work seized upon to be canonized?
- The concept of inscription, in late 20th century literary criticism, signaled an interest in the irrevocable rhetoricism and play of/in literary language. Thus, as an alternative to recent sinological concerns with writing's relationship to "power" and "authority," scholars are encouraged to consider the interrelationship of rhetorics, author-ity, and the oral, as in the simultaneous invention of the *xing-trope* (興) and of the individual Author in the Han Dynasty exegetes' (re-) inscription of the *Shijing* odes as a Canon.

Manuscript length should preferably not exceed fifty pages in the present *BMFEA* format. Exceptions may apply for longer manuscripts of high interest. For further author's instructions or inquiries, see the preceding page or contact the editors. Manuscript deadline: March 31, 2003.

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